



Class PZ.3

Book P4337

Tre
Copy 3

GPO

TREASURE TRAIL

250
m
x
1/27

Some BORZOI Novels

THREE PILGRIMS AND A TINKER

Mary Borden

THE TATTOOED COUNTESS

Carl Van Vechten

THE ETERNAL HUNTRESS

Rayner Seelig

THE FIRE IN THE FLINT

Walter F. White

THE LORD OF THE SEA

M. P. Shiel

BALISAND

Joseph Hergesheimer

SOUND AND FURY

James Henle

WINGS

Ethel M. Kelley

THE TIDE

Mildred Cram

ORDEAL

Dale Collins

TREASURE TRAIL

ROLAND PERTWEE



NEW YORK ALFRED A. KNOPF MCMXXIV

Copied 3.

COPYRIGHT, 1924, BY ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC. ·
PUBLISHED, SEPTEMBER, 1924 · SET UP,
ELECTROTYPED, AND PRINTED BY THE VAIL-
BALLOU PRESS, BINGHAMTON N. Y. · PAPER
FURNISHED BY W. F. ETHERINGTON & CO.,
NEW YORK. · BOUND BY THE H. WOLFF ES-
TATE, NEW YORK. ·

PZ 3
P4327
Tone
Copy 2

20 replace lost copy
Jan. 31/27

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TREASURE TRAIL

CHAPTER I.

“WE sympathize with you,” said the bank manager, “but that is how the situation stands.”

Vernon Winslowe fumbled for his cigarette case, got up and flicked his lower lip with a nervous forefinger.

“But I don’t understand,” he said; “the whole thing is so—— You don’t mind if I smoke? Thanks. Won’t you? No. You see, Sullivan told me distinctly he only wanted me to back the bill for a month or two until he had sold out some American railroad stock. There was never any suggestion that he wouldn’t be able to meet it himself. It was just a friendly transaction. Now I haven’t a match.”

The bank manager produced a box of wax vestas, struck one and offered it ceremonially. In ordinary circumstances he did not encourage smoking in his private office, but the case justified the small concession. From the bank’s point of view, Vernon Winslowe had been an ideal depositor—of the type which leaves large sums of money lying idle in a current account to the profit of the firm.

“Thanks. Why, he never even sent me a line—this is the first I’ve heard of it.”

“Did you know Mr. Sullivan well?”

“Casually. We met, you know, from time to time. Hunted a bit together. He was a member of one or two of my clubs.”

Mr. Woodward shook his head.

“Rather a scanty acquaintanceship to warrant backing his signature for five thousand pounds.”

“I trusted the fellar.”

Mr. Woodward became grave.

“It has been my unhappy experience to find that persons who are in difficulties are all too ready to shift their liabilities on to the shoulders of their friends. I fear Mr. Sullivan has proved himself a traitor to friendship. In the circumstances we have no choice but to pay up with what grace we may.”

“And how shall I stand then?”

Mr. Woodward consulted some figures on a slip of paper at his side.

“Your credit is five thousand one hundred and seventy-two pounds, eight shillings. We shall, of course, be pleased to meet your cheques up to a certain margin until such a time as you may have concluded the sale of any property or shares you may think necessary.”

Vernon Winslowe threw up his head and laughed.

“Shares or property—you’re joking. Beyond a tumble-down old barn of a house in Cornwall and few bits of furniture, I haven’t a bean until my old uncle pegs out.”

“Mr. Winslowe, you are not serious.”

“I soon shall be.”

“But the money you inherited from your father?”

Vernon waved a hand in the air. Mr. Woodward pushed his chair back.

“Impossible.”

“On the contrary, all too possible.” His face became suddenly grim. “It comes home to me rather forcibly that I’ve acted like every kind of a fool.”

“But seventy thousand pounds in a little over three years?”

“Seventy-five, to be exact,” said Vernon; “and, barring a few bright patches, precious little good it’s done me.” He threw his cigarette into the spotless grate. “When must we meet that bill?”

“At once.”

“You can’t wait until I’ve seen Sullivan?”

Mr. Woodward looked up in surprise.

“Seen him?” he repeated. “But he left England quietly three days ago—evaded his creditors and——”

“Bolted.”

“Exactly. My informant tells me a woman accompanied him.”

“A woman! He married her?”

“I believe not.”

Vernon flushed.

“I say, look out—be careful, rather—I mean—who was she?”

“I cannot say.”

Vernon’s breath escaped between shut teeth.

“We won’t inquire,” he said; then: “Comes to this, I’ve been swindled.” A sudden surge of anger reddened his forehead. “My Lord! Woodward, I’m beginning to wonder where I haven’t been swindled these last three years. Well, it’s no good raising a wail—one learns by experience. Thanks very much. Good day.”

As he turned the handle of the door the bank manager’s voice recalled him.

“In the circumstances, Mr. Winslowe, I fear I shall have to retract my words about a temporary accommodation. My directors——”

Vernon Winslowe cut him short.

“Oh, naturally,” said Vernon. “Naturally.” Then he went out.

On the pavement he stopped and lit another cigarette.

“So much for my African farm!” he said. “What’s left to do? A hundred or two, and then——” His fists clenched. “If Sullivan were here now! Damned twister! Lord, what a fool I’ve been!”

A panorama of other little incidents crowded up in his brain. There was an odd similarity between them—the result in nearly every case had been the same. Men he had believed in—trusted implicitly—who—— Why, only the night before, those Congo shares—a thing given him as absolutely sound—had gone to nothing. Naturally, the man who advised him to buy couldn’t have known, or even guessed at, the true state of affairs, but—— No, hang it—he must take it as a sportsman! Perish the thought that every one of his acquaintances was concerned in a conspiracy to do him harm.

But it was a difficult thought to escape from in view of his experiences since, from a poor but rather distinguished naval officer, he had become a man of leisure with money to burn. How many fellows who had borrowed from him had ever attempted to repay? How many racing tips followed in all good faith had brought him a winner? The same with investments. Everything he had touched, governed by other men's advice, had gone wrong—everything. Then there were those hard-luck stories whose tellers had ever found in Vernon Winslowe a sympathetic and a generous listener. He had stepped from the Navy a white and woolly lamb, and tuft by tuft the wool had been shorn from his hide. It was he who paid the fares for other men's travel—the invited guest who met his host's bills as well as his own. With sudden resentment he saw himself the victim of organized conspiracy, wherein no single method had been neglected to separate him from his coin. From the society of clean, honest companions, bound together by indissoluble ties of common hardship and common danger—the everyday fare of war conditions—he had declined into a coterie of clever ones who, under the ensign of heartiness and good-fellowship, worked to despoil the very men whose whisky they drank and whose hands they clasped in friendship. Blind, credulous fool to have given his trust into such keeping. Criminal fool not to have cleared out before they stripped him clean. For months misgivings had pricked him that not to chance alone was due the steady ebbing of his fortunes. But he had waited for the tide to turn—had shirked taking the firm decision and making the clean cut. His energies had been dulled by the possession of money which he had not earned. Life was too simple, too easy. It was pleasant to keep a few hunters, take a moor—follow the seasons abroad—play a bit of polo—knock about with merry companions. These things were much too good to jettison at a first symptom of bad luck. The habit of work had been overlaid by the habit of idleness, and he hesitated to slam the door of his chambers in Duke Street and start life on an African farm with his sleeves rolled up. The possession of riches had been so amusing. It

was fun to be the rich man of the party and to share one's riches with a service generosity among the less fortunate. It stood to his credit that to no one had he refused aid and from no one had he asked credit for the aid so willingly given. Even those who sponged most freely admitted him to be the prince of givers, the most trusting fellow alive. Some of the more adventurous declared that he was almost too easy prey.

And now he was to pay the penalty of his own free-handedness.

At the top of St. James's Street he stopped and looked at his watch. It was a quarter to one—too early for lunch. He considered whether or no he should drop in anywhere for a short drink, and decided against it. While he hesitated a man named Dillon came up and touched him on the sleeve.

"Hello, V. W.," exclaimed the new-comer; "the very chap I wanted to see. I'm taking a girl out to lunch at the Carlton, and was stepping across to the club to cash a cheque. You can save me five minutes by lending me a tenner. I'm late as it is."

"When are you meeting her?"

"One o'clock, old man."

"Then you've heaps of time to get to the club and back."

Dillon looked hurt.

"If you'd rather not," said he, and pursued his way with a shrug.

Vernon hauled him back with the crook of his stick. He knew nothing against Dillon, and it was a pity to sacrifice a generous reputation for the sake of a ten-pound note.

"Take it, you ass," he said, pulling a couple of fivers from his case; "but let me have it back soon. I'm rather broke."

Dillon was all smiles again.

"I'll send my man along with it to-night. You must meet this girl; she's a darling. G'bye." With a wave of the hand he was gone.

Vernon Winslowe walked slowly down St. James's Street towards the Mall. It was a clear, sunny day, and he intended to sit under the trees for a while and think. He was just entering the gates when an unworthy thought attacked him.

He tried to banish it, but without success. It reasserted itself in his mind.

“Go and find out,” said the thought; “no harm in making sure.”

Turning about, he strode off in the direction of the Carlton. The commissionaire touched his hat, a smiling cloak-room attendant took his coat and stick with a word of welcome. He entered the Palm Court and ordered a cocktail. Dillon was nowhere to be seen. The head-waiter approached him and he put a question.

“Monsieur Dillon? But no, I have reserved no table for Monsieur Dillon.”

“Ah,” said Vernon, “perhaps he’s lunching downstairs.”

He swallowed his drink and went down to the grillroom. The frock-coated gentleman in charge shook his head politely.

“He has not been here for many days.”

“Thank you,” said Vernon. “I’ll wait in the lounge till he turns up.”

He lit a cigarette and waited. A small clock struck the quarter. Vernon’s anger was growing very cold.

“The liar,” he muttered. “The liar.”

Once again he returned to the Palm Court and hung about for twenty minutes, but neither Dillon nor his darling made an appearance. It was as well, perhaps, for the meeting could hardly have been a pleasant one. Wave upon wave of resentment was breaking against the battlements of Vernon Winslowe’s humour and forbearance. Indignation was storing itself up within him. It increased his blood pressure, troubled the clear workings of his brain and lungs. The foundations of his generosity and good nature were beginning to sink. The edifice of life that he had built for himself was slowly but surely tilting off the straight. It was an odd feeling—an alarming feeling. Under the novelty of it sweat started from his forehead in hot beads. Angry he had been often enough before, violent even, but resentment and malice were qualities with which he was a stranger. Also they

were qualities which he had despised most in other men. Yet——

“Why, if it isn’t V. W.,” said a girl’s voice. “Doris, you know Vernon Winslowe.”

He came to his feet and found himself being introduced by one sunshiny maiden to another. With the first he was acquainted, in a haphazard kind of way. The second he only knew by sight—a privilege to be shared by anyone who had twelve and six wherewith to buy a theatre stall and who possessed a memory for the faces of the ladies of the chorus.

“We were waiting for Bobby Tile,” said Lola, “but the wretch has rung up to say he can’t come. Be a dear, V. W., and give us lunch.”

“We’re much too well dressed to go to an A.B.C.,” fluted Doris, with a twenty-two carat smile, “and it simply won’t run to anything more ’spensive.”

“Of course, if you’re expecting someone,” began Lola. Vernon shook his head.

“I was only expecting my luck to hold,” he replied. “Isn’t there a saying, ‘it never rains but it pours’?”

“You’ve had a lucky day?”

“You wouldn’t believe if I told you.”

“Then of course you’d love to give us lunch?”

What could he say? He said nothing and made a gesture that might have meant anything.

“V. W. is the soul of chivalry,” said Lola, “and he did marvels in the war, my dear. Didn’t you get a V.C. or something?”

Vernon smiled. It was evident his guests intended to pay for the lunch with flattery and endearment. He hated himself for recognizing the fact. It was pitiable to say good-bye to a long-established credulity. Lola and Doris belonged to a type for which he had little use, but hitherto he had been simple enough to accept their honeyed addresses with mild appreciation. It was only now he read trickery in every word and inflexion. Subconsciously he added another black mark to the already lengthening list of resentments.

This circumstance notwithstanding, he conducted himself as host in a manner that defied criticism. He was charming—he was lavish. He looked to it that the wine was not too dry and that the fruits were out of season. His guests were delighted—nay, more—ecstatic. They talked all the while and looked as pretty as they possibly could. Perhaps it is a euphemism to say they talked—prattled is the word. They prattled about “shows” they had seen—things they “simply adored” or were “too impossible”—the kind of men they liked or couldn’t stand (in this matter they were eloquent and revealed predilections in favour of dark men with very smooth hair and straight brows—men, in short, with a marked likeness to Vernon). They prattled about taxis, face cream—a little hat in Bond Street, much too expensive to buy and, “which of course, is sure to have been snapped up by now, so it’s no good talking of it”—about films which had been or were about to be released—about tiresome relations—late hours—the latest dance steps—getting married—being hard up—where to buy the best gloves, and how to spend the afternoon.

Vernon’s task was easy. He had leisure to lean back in his chair and reflect upon the damnable innocence of it all.

When the meal was over and the bill was paid, the problem of what to do next was ventilated.

“You’ve given us a duck of a lunch, so you decide. Shall we go and see Douglas Fairbanks or shall we stroll round and do a bit of shopping?”

It was clear which answer was expected, and for the first time in his life Vernon deliberately gave the wrong one. It marked an epoch in his downward career. The two sunshiny maidens, bravely endeavouring to satisfy themselves with such blessings as had already been bestowed, were conducted to the cinema. Moreover, they were conducted on foot along certain by-ways of the West End remarkable for an absence of attractive shop-fronts. Of the three none hated that walk so much as Vernon Winslowe. But, as has been said, it marked an epoch.

Very splendid and daring was the picture, but had he been

asked afterwards, Vernon would have been unable to recount a single incident that had occurred. His mind was occupied solely with the calculated ruin of his fortunes.

During the interval the lights were lowered and the result of the Grand National was projected on the screen, a race-card showing all the runners, a giant hand ticking off the winners—one, two, and three.

Vernon Winslowe leaned forward in his seat, then threw up his head and laughed.

Not even a place!

Without a word of explanation or farewell he walked out of the building.

Not even a place!

So much for Atwood's tip!

"A certainty," Atwood had said. "The surest thing in years. Put your shirt on it, my boy."

But Vernon had been wise enough to keep his shirt against a rainy day—a shirt roughly valued at five thousand pounds—a shirt which, as events of the morning proved, had passed over his head for the last time and now covered the retreating form of Sullivan. He had, however, backed Atwood's opinion to the extent of handing him two hundred and fifty pounds to invest on the course at the best price obtainable.

Not even a place!

"And I begin to wonder if the beggar put the money on at all."

Vernon Winslowe delivered this remark in the astonished face of a passer-by, who hurriedly crossed the road at the imminent risk of being run down by a platoon of taxis.

CHAPTER II.

HE was not very sure what happened after that. With mutinous thoughts for company, he wandered from street to street. In Trafalgar Square he got mixed up in a demonstration of the unemployed and found himself occupying the position of a buffer State between the conflicting forces of order and disorder. The entertainment included a police baton charge and a small hail of flints wrapped in newspapers. Also there were broken heads and a good deal of general scuffling. Being in the mood for something of the kind, Vernon indulged in a free-lance battle of his own, striking out with impartiality in both directions. He emerged from the fray brighter in spirit and poorer by the loss of a gold watch, which in defiance of regulations had been presented to him by the crew of a submarine on the occasion of his being awarded the D.S.O.

Fortunately, in view of his existing state of mind, he was unaware of the loss until later in the day. His appearance as a result of the fray giving rise to comment from passers-by, he determined to return to his chambers and change his clothes.

In St. James's Square his attention was attracted by a sprightly figure striding along before him with ringing steps. With a gasp of astonishment Vernon realized that he was in the presence of the last line of his defences. True, there is nothing very astonishing in meeting a man who happens to be your uncle a few steps away from his own club, and it was not on this account that Vernon gasped. His astonishment was induced by the evidence of health and physical fitness which radiated from the figure before him. When last they met some three months before, the old gentleman was testy, infirm, and preparing for the supreme adventure

of dying. Yet here he was swinging along like a boy and using his cane not for support, but to rattle against the railings.

“Bless my soul,” he exclaimed, in response to Vernon’s “Uncle Fletcher.” “What in blazes have you been up to? Are ye drunk? Been in a fight? Look at your hat! And your tie’s out.”

Vernon nodded towards Trafalgar Square.

“Those unemployed beggars,” he explained.

“Like your father, like your father! Always in trouble—a typical Winslowe. The old pirate strain, eh, eh!” He supplemented his remarks with a dig in the ribs.

“You seem extraordinarily fit,” said Vernon gravely. “Never saw such a change in a man.”

Old Fletcher Winslowe threw back his head and laughed.

“Ah, ha, ha, you spot it, eh? My boy, I’m a youngster again—a youngster, my boy.” And to illustrate the truth of his words he performed a vigorous *pas seul* on the pavement. “Want to know why? An elixir, my boy—twenty years of new life coursing through my veins. Thyroid, my lad, thyroid. ’Pon my soul, I’d guarantee to go five rounds with any man you like to name!”

He covered up, put in some clever footwork, and handed the K.O. to an imaginary adversary with a vitality amazing for one of his years.

“Well done, and good luck to you,” said Vernon, and he meant it.

Whatever else he might be charged with, no one could have accused Vernon Winslowe of belonging to the type which marks time in a pair of socks in the expectation of filling a dead man’s shoes. At the decease of his uncle, under the terms of his grandfather’s will, twenty thousand pounds was to come to Vernon. It was of a piece with the general irony of the situation that this inheritance, from occupying a position in the immediate foreground, had melted into the distance. Thus to the list of those who had conspired against him was to be added a German doctor and an African mon-

key. The thought made Vernon laugh—and the laugh pleased the old man exceedingly.

“A capital boy,” he said, bringing his hand down with a whack on Vernon’s shoulder. “Most nephews would be kicking and cursing at a turn like this. Come in and have a pint of beer. Whisky’s the devil, but beer’s a drink for the gods. Haven’t touched it for fifteen years, and now I’m doing my two quarts a day.”

But Vernon refused the invitation. In some oddly reflex way the fight and the meeting with the rejuvenated Fletcher Winslowe had done him good. He felt less out at elbows with the world and better prepared to meet adversity with good humour.

A batch of newly-arrived bills waiting on his writing-table and the discovery that his watch had been stolen were mainly responsible for the return of his angry gloom. His man was off duty that night. Vernon turned on a bath, and while it was filling, wandered from room to room of his little suite, leaving a collar in one place and a waistcoat in another and the shoes he had been wearing somewhere else. It was entirely alien to his ordinary habit to act thus. Life in the Navy had made of Vernon one of the tidiest and most methodical men alive. But a strange new restlessness was attacking him, a restlessness that begat a sudden dislike of order and squareness. The perfect symmetry of the mantelpiece, with its clock and candlesticks and photograph frames arranged with mathematical precision, offended and irritated him. He wanted to push things about—set the furniture crooked and tilt the pictures awry. Why should his rooms be allowed to behave as though nothing had happened to their owner? A room is, or should be, an expression of its owner’s mind. The decks of a ship are not scrubbed when mutiny is aboard. Vernon Winslowe, although he scarcely realized it, had declared a mutiny against his own traditions. His desire was toward disorder and the upsetting of established things, and in pursuing his desire he upset himself—stumbled over his kicked-off shoes and put his hand through the glass of a picture-frame when he sought to steady himself. Normally he

would have laughed at the misadventure; to-day he swore, sucked the cut in the heel of his hand, and, acting on an impulse of senseless anger, tore the picture from the wall and was about to hurl it in the corner when its subject arrested the act.

It was an enlarged snapshot he had taken at a meet two years ago, a chaos of hounds and horsemen, grooms, loungers, motors, farm-carts and bicycles. Prominent in the centre of the picture was Sullivan, mounted on a tall grey mare. Beside him stood a girl in a riding-habit. She was pulling on a glove and smiling into Sullivan's face. Extraordinarily alive and alert she looked. Her eyes were full of laughter and of fun. There was an amazing sweetness about her mouth—a sweetness and a determination, strangely mingled. It was because of this girl Vernon had taken the photograph, it was because of her he had stayed in the neighbourhood a week longer than he had intended. They had never spoken to one another, although once or twice they took a fence side by side. He had meant to get an introduction and then he heard she was engaged—to Sullivan—to Sullivan!

Vernon Winslowe stood with the photograph in his hands—hands which shook violently. What was it the bank manager had said? “Gone abroad with some woman.” “Married?” “I believe not.”

The picture crashed into the grate and simultaneously there was a loud knocking at the front door.

“Yes, what is it?” cried Vernon, flinging open the door.

A young man in evening dress was on the landing.

“I fancy your bath is overflowing,” he said. “There's a perfect Niagara coming through my ceiling, and as I'm giving a dinner party it's rather a nuisance.”

“I don't know what you're talking about,” said Vernon truculently.

“Everything's come through except the soap,” said the young man, and diving into the bathroom which adjoined the front door, he quickly turned off the tap.

“The overflow must be blocked up. So sorry to bother you, but the cutlets were practically washed away, and as

the chicken which I had ordered to follow is in no sense a water-fowl, I thought——”

“Oh, go to the devil,” said Vernon.

He had lost his sense of humour for the first time on record. His soul was in danger.

There is only one further incident to add to the score of the day's disasters. It took place at a rather rowdy pot-house known as the Five Nations Club, where a number of men had gathered together for the purpose of expressing, through the medium of alcohol, rejoicing at the success achieved by a certain Mr. Atwood in finding the winner of the Grand National. Mr. Atwood had made a pot of money—it bulged from him everywhere. In his own picturesque speech he described himself as being “all over the stuff.” The liberality of the entertainment he provided proved him to be a good fellow—nay, more, the very best of fellows. Nearly everyone was drunk, and with that strangely limpid vision which is one of the greatest blessings drink bestows, they saw in Atwood qualities of grace and excellence hitherto undreamed of. Again and again was he called upon to reveal by what miracle of foresight he had picked the winner.

“My dear boys, I got sixty to one five weeks ago. Planked on a hundred with old Johnny Dive. And on the course I was so plumb sure it was the goods, I took a chance and put up another two-fifty at a hundred to six.”

“Did you?”

Everyone in the room heard the quiet, menacing voice that spoke out of the shadows by the door.

“Two-fifty, Atwood, I think you said.”

“Hallo, V. W.,” said a voice with a hiccup. “Wha's the trouble with you?”

But Vernon Winslowe paid no heed to the question. He walked straight up to Atwood and dropped a hand on his shoulder. Curiously purple Atwood had become all of a sudden. His smile of welcome was sickly.

“Five weeks ago, eh?” said Vernon. “Five weeks ago, Atwood? I didn't ask you for that tip, you remember. You

offered it—you remember that, don't you? You gave it me as a friend. I suppose you took my bit yourself, eh?"

The courage of alcohol stimulated Atwood to reply.

"What's wrong if I did?"

"Nothing in the world," said Vernon slowly. "Nothing in the world. It's sound finance to give a man a certain loser and collar his stakes. Nothing wrong if you can find a man who's fool enough to stand for it. God!" His voice suddenly broke upwards. "God, I'm going to tell the lot of you what I think——"

The ring of inflamed faces turned toward him in anxious expectation.

"You—you," and suddenly he stopped short, and threw up his head in a kind of laugh. "You clever gentlemen! I suppose I should be grateful for the lesson. And profit by it—and profit by it."

His departure was as unexpected as his arrival.

CHAPTER III.

THERE is a song which in recent months has achieved popularity mainly on account of possessing a doleful and plaintive last line. Each verse recounts pithily a series of disasters resulting in the decline of some unhappy victim from virtue into vice. The tidings of fall are recorded by the simple phrase "Another good man gone wrong," and in no single instance would the fallen appear to be to blame. A concatenation of unkind incidents—incidents over which he had no power of control—was responsible. Now the case of Vernon Winslowe was in point—for he was a generous and chivalrous gentleman brought to ruin through no other fault than credulity and a desire to improve the lot of his fellows. Granted ability to express oneself in verse, it should have been possible in four metric lines to have said all that has been recorded in the earlier chapters, and thus have advanced more rapidly to the point at which this story takes a more unusual turn. In the absence of a lyrical gift, let it be said in plain prose that Vernon Winslowe, D.S.O., D.S.C., was beyond question a good man, for all that uncharitable circumstance twisted him out of the straight course into the crooked.

For what follows, heredity may to some extent be held responsible. The archives of the house of Winslowe provided plenty of parallels in which Vernon's forbears had acted with more violence than tact. Dotted down the ages were records of wild deeds carried out by Winslowes both on the side of law and against it. Fletcher Winslowe, after a gallant career as a sea-rover, ended his days unhappily in a brush with a Russian sloop somewhere in the Baltic. He was captured, faced his trial ashore, and subsequently was hanged on a raft gibbet with a couple of iron hooks

beneath his ribs. For sixteen hours he lived, swinging from his chains, while the raft drifted down-stream past town and village toward the sea. It was a cruel end for a man who everyone admitted had been a genial rascal.

Then there was Roger, who in his day had been one of the hardest riding, hardest living, hardest drinking, and most generous of Cornish squires. A portrait of Roger hung over the mantelpiece at Vernon's rooms in Duke Street. A keen cold-eyed man with a mouth like a steel trap and a mighty pair of hands. Roger had lived in the old grey house at Peranporth where Vernon had spent his boyhood. Roger's body lay in the little graveyard at the back of the village. Beneath the creeping mosses that wove a green tapestry over his granite headstone were engraved the words:

ROGER WINSLOWE
1589-1649
GENT ADVENTURER

Time had effaced the line that followed:

HIS SINS WERE MANY—HIS VIRTUE WAS IN COURAGE

A yellow MS. set forth how after being the darling of the Duchy for a matter of sixteen years—a man beloved by great and humble—a very pattern amongst squires—he had suddenly disappeared, taking with him the plate from the family church, a horse and a few trinkets from a neighbour, and a bag of money belonging to a cousin.

On the morning of his disappearance a tragic discovery was made of three dead bodies in the walled-in garden at the back of the house. All three had died of rapier wounds in the throat; their swords lay on the grass beside them. The bodies were identified as belonging to the family lawyer and two other gentlemen well known in the district. A terrified servant made a deposition to the effect that the two gentlemen seconded a duel between Roger and his lawyer. The duel arose out of an argument in which Roger charged

his lawyer with a series of frauds against the estate. The affair was short and sweet, and ended in Roger's favour. Whereupon he turned to the two seconds and engaged them.

"Gentlemen," he is reputed to have said, "you have witnessed the dispatch of one who violated a trust. You, too, have violated a trust even more sacred—the trust of friendship. Thanks to my friends, I am a ruined man. Guard yourselves."

In three minutes it was all over, and half an hour later Roger Winslowe, on a stolen horse and with the church plate in a sack strapped to his saddle bow, was galloping across the country towards Plymouth.

The identity of Roger Winslowe with that of a famous pirate, who some time later made an unwelcome appearance on the trade routes in China Seas, was only established after his death. He had grown a beard, and much of sweetness had gone from his voice. The one man who recognized him and foolishly cried out his name was, with expressions of the deepest regret, constrained to spend his remaining years marooned upon an island in the South Seas such as provided an example of the eloquence of silence.

For ten years Roger Winslowe harried the China trade and amassed an immense fortune, the bulk of which was believed to have been buried in a hiding-place known only to himself. During that period he earned a reputation of being the Robin Hood of the seas, for, despite his austerity and predatory habits, he rarely, if ever, committed a brutal or unchivalrous act. He took money and jewels, and he left behind a sense of privilege and a pleasant memory. Fever and ill health pursuing him, he returned to England, bought back the old house in Cornwall, and occupied it under a false name until the date of his death. Many there were who thought they recognized in the black-bearded, one-armed man the light-hearted and cavalier young squire who had disappeared a score of years before under such exceptional circumstances. These thoughts, however, they kept discreetly to themselves, for many blessings flowed from the granite house, and there was that in the eyes of

the old man which augured danger for whosoever should prove traitor against him. In 1649 he announced his intention of taking a voyage to the South Seas for an object which he would disclose to no one. Indeed, he was actively engaged in fitting out a ship when the hand of death closed upon him.

He left behind a full confession of his misdeeds—a forgiveness for the friends who had brought him to ruin—and a handsome bequest of plate to the church he had despoiled. But of his hidden treasure there was no mention. The secret of its hiding-place died with him.

It was to the portrait of Roger Winslowe that Vernon addressed himself when at an A.M. hour of the night he entered his chambers. The new generation spoke to the old across the gulf of separating years in a tone that was bitter and angry. "History repeats itself, Roger! They've served me as they served you, but there are no dead men on the grass to show what I feel about it."

The same cold glint in the painted eyes was reflected in Vernon's: the dead and the living were strangely alike.

After leaving the Five Nations, Vernon had marched through the streets fiercely struggling with savage and revengeful impulses. A desire to hit back obsessed him—to hit back not with his hands but with the same cruel and invisible weapons that had brought about his own destruction. At about 1 A.M. he had found himself before the doors of the Midnight Legion Club, and acting on a sudden impulse he entered, seated himself at an empty table, and ordered a bottle of wine. In the past he had spent many jolly evenings at the Midnight Legion, amused by its Smart Set naughtiness and air of tired but determined gaiety. To-night the complexion of his thoughts warped the easy view he had been used to take, and endowed the entire gathering with an air of cynical vice.

He saw no humour in the spectacle of a famous actress who that morning had appeared in a successful suit for divorce, taking supper and dancing with the husband of whom she had ridded herself. He saw nothing but false

values in a system that made such an anomaly possible. It was a hideous phantasmagoria made up of married men who whispered passionate insincerities into the ears of other men's wives—dudes who drivelled in loud falsettos, braying of love affairs, of caviare and Russian Vodka. Young men tremendously strong and silent and possessed of the rare gift of dropping their voices to complete strangers—women with pink lips and brown smudgy eyes with drooping lids that were only raised at the provocation of a direct affront. The Midnight Legion! The very flower and chivalry of England's manhood and womanhood disporting themselves at the rate of about a shilling a second, making shameless confidences to shameless confidants—drinking too much, talking too much, and thinking never.

The Midnight Legion! The Smart Set—the best people! What a travesty it was—what a midden! The very scent of the place was enough to turn a man sick. Leaning against a wall, dabbing at his mouth with the wet butt of a dead cigar, rolling his head from side to side and breathing the slow, staggering breath of half-drunkenness, was one of England's most brilliant men, whose fame—God! A midden!

Clinging to his arm, laughing into a sodden face, was a girl—a thing with bobbed hair—a child almost. A child? A crook! Taking advantage of the great man's weakness to advance a pretended acquaintance.

And this was life—and these were men and women—of such as these was the world composed. Tricksters, libertines—laughing liars and frauds. The same everywhere. Vernon Winslowe's desire to be avenged on those immediately responsible for his ruin and the loss of his faith suddenly developed a wider application. Why should the weapon be discharged at a limited few—what did it matter who should be struck when the shot was fired? One man or woman was as bad as another. Yes, it was fair enough; and even if unfair, what matter? He would cram the barrel to overflowing, loose off blindly into the brown, and let

fall who might. How best to do this thing was the question—how best—how cleverest.

He rose, beckoned a waiter, and signed his bill. It was the first time he had signed a bill with no intention of paying. As he passed out he wished the sum had been larger. This trivial piece of brigandage gave him a queer sense of satisfaction. It was an act against his conscience, and he was as glad as a sneak-thief who has picked his first pocket.

The cool night air chilled his anger, and his mind began to work clearly.

He had got his plan. In a flash it came to him. One second not there, and the next—matured. A working plan and clever, clever, clever.

He rolled his tongue round his mouth and laughed. How easy it was to swindle people—how simple, how attractive! One had merely to decide how much one would filch from unsuspecting pockets and the thing was done. There were no difficulties to overcome—except conscience, and conscience was asleep—dead, for all he cared. How much!

There was a new moon, and Vernon addressed her. "How much? Mustn't overdo it. How much?" Perhaps the moon was responsible for the notion that came to him. She affects the ocean tides, and why not tides in the affairs of men?

Vernon rapidly added up the sums of money he had recently lost through the advice of and help given to his friends. The total was roughly eight thousand pounds.

"Eight thousand! Good enough!"

At his rooms we know how for a while he looked at the portrait of his ancestor, Roger Winslowe. After that he rummaged in a store cupboard at the end of the passage and dragged out an old tin uniform case. This he unlocked and took from within a rusty iron cylinder and a book, the cover of which was protected with American cloth.

With these he returned to the sitting-room, switched off the centre light, and turned on a reading-lamp at the writing-table. Next he took the cylinder, and after removing a

length of soap plaster from the junction between the top and the base, he shook out from inside a rolled-up chart and spread it on the table before him. The chart had been drawn up with rough, seaman-like skill on fabric which had slightly perished. There was a kind of clumsy accuracy and assurance in the lines and occasional lettering. Despite the fading for which time was responsible, the essentials were plainly visible. In the top left-hand corner under the arrow of orientation and the divided scale was written, "Trefusis Island. North 159. West 23." There was very little detail in the body of the map—other than the outlines of a lagoon—a dotted demarcation of some reefs and soundings, and three small circles denoting fresh-water springs.

From the scale the island was shown to be three miles long by a mile and a half across.

There was no explanation for what purpose the map had been made. It was signed R. W. and dated 1637.

It was many years since Vernon Winslowe had found the cylinder and the old book which accompanied it. He and another boy, Ralph Whittaker, were expending their energy in tunnelling a disused cellar in the old Cornish house in which Roger Winslowe had dwelt. Ambition to discover an underground way alleged to have been used by smugglers inspired the operation. Profiting by the fact that Vernon's father was distant by a full county's length in pursuit of a stag, the two boys, armed with picks and crowbars, attacked the granite skin of the cellar to such excellent effect that at the end of an hour's labour the business end of Vernon's pick went clean through the masonry into a black void beyond. After that they worked like galley slaves, slashing and levering until there was a hole big enough to enter by. Being versed in the proper procedure of such affairs as set forth in "The Swiss Family Robinson" and other books of a similiar kind, they did not attempt an entrance until the evil gases of the tunnel should be dispelled. To speed the work of purification, a treacle-tin full of gunpowder was exploded in the cavity, which unhappily detonated ahead of expectation, with the result that hands were scorched, faces black-

ened, and eyebrows singed. But what matter? The adventure was great enough to warrant a small disaster. Possibly the explosion would not have been so violent if the space disclosed had been actually a tunnel. The intense white light of combustion coupled with subsequent investigation with a stick revealed the fact that their discovery amounted to no more than a small square space no larger than an ordinary cupboard. The disappointment of the adventurers at this inglorious end may well be imagined, but their spirits rose to a fever pitch in finding within the recess an iron box about two feet long by eighteen inches wide. The box was secured with a hasp and padlock, the latter being so rusted as to resemble a piece of brick. There seemed small likelihood that any key would ever again turn the wards of the poor perished thing, nor were the two boys in a mood for delay. Their desire was to see what the box contained, and in this matter a crowbar was helpful. A connoisseur of seventeenth-century relics would have despaired at the rude treatment that unhappy box sustained at the hands of these youthful enthusiasts; they destroyed it with their beatings and burstings. When at last the lid was wrenched back on its twisted hinges, little of the original form remained. And within was nothing but pulp—green, mildewed pulp which filtered through the fingers that sifted it like wet sand. It was clear that the box had contained papers—the key, perhaps, to the hidden treasure, the memoirs, perhaps, of a man sorely bruised by the world. Impossible to conjecture what those papers might have been or estimate the loss their disintegration had occasioned. All that remained were the corpses of written words and paper leaves which had rotted into musty-smelling particles through the steady corrosion of time.

Not a doubloon, not a gold moidore, not a piece of eight. Dust, and nothing but dust.

The two boys had looked at one another dismally.

“Stinking luck! Tip it on its side, there may be something underneath.”

This they did, and found their reward. Beneath the pile

of decayed papers was the rusty iron cylinder and an old ship's log-book protected by wrappings of cracked and perished oilcloth.

To a couple of boys properly equipped with adventurous spirits, that log-book was joy complete. It set forth details of hair-raising exploits on the high seas, written with a simplicity of style truly remarkable. Of course, they decided at once that the map in the iron cylinder was of a treasure island, but this gay hope was banished by the discovery of an entry in the log-book which stated the island had been named Trefusis Island, after a certain John Trefusis, who, on a point of diplomacy, had been marooned there. There could be very little doubt that the map had been drawn up so that after the death of Roger Winslowe the unhappy man might be released from captivity.

These, then, are the circumstances in which the iron cylinder and the old log-book, after lying hidden for a matter of three hundred years, came into the possession of Vernon Winslowe. With a boyish love of secrecy, neither Vernon nor his friend Ralph Whittaker breathed a word to a soul in regard to the find. The whole matter was placed under a *sigillum* and was only broached in conditions of the greatest privacy. With the passage of time Ralph and Vernon drifted apart, their old comradeship fading out as their ways in the world divided.

For a full hour Vernon Winslowe turned the pages of the old log-book and stared at the map that was spread out beside him. The success of his plan lay in its simplicity and in its natural appeal to young and old. It was based on enthusiasm and the assumption, so readily proved on the first day of any war, that a yearning for adventure lives in every heart. He would dangle a bait such as could not be refused. The man or woman does not exist who is insensible to the lure of hidden treasure—and the call of the South Sea islands. Hidden treasure—a pirate's hoard. Romance rings in every vowel and consonant that compose the words. The very sound of them sets the blood tingling and quickens the

slow pulse of every day. Be he never so old, who is insensible, who has outgrown and can resist the magnetism of doubloons and pieces of eight in a frame of coral and waving palms? It cannot be done—the thing is ingrained—irresistible. Buried treasure is part of the world's real estate—a legacy to young and old alike—a link between age and youth. Stevenson knew when he wrote a masterpiece that shall gladden every age down all the ages. He knew he had discovered a master-word in the title of his book that should release scores from the bondage of cities to sail the seas in tall ships of imagination. And Vernon Winslowe knew—knew beyond shadow of doubt—that he would sound a call that north, south, east and west could not choose but answer. But Vernon Winslowe was angry, and his thoughts that night were distorted. He was baiting a trap for the people's greed, and did not see the real direction of his appeal. The words Romance, Adventure, were forgotten.

He poured a few drops of indian ink into an egg-cup, and diluted it with water until it was the same pale brown color as the writing on the map. In the centre of the map he made a cross, and in one corner wrote: "*X marks cache. Needle rock meridian point of shadow 15 paces due north, 3 west and under.*"

With the exception of the words "*X marks cache*" he copied the rest from an entry in the log-book which had been casually scrawled across an empty page without any explanation as to why or wherefore.

This delicate work was undertaken with the greatest care, and a very pretty piece of penmanship it was. The tone of the ink and the character of the letters were identical with the original.

When he had finished, Vernon Winslowe sat back in his chair and shivered. There was sweat upon his forehead, and his hands were clammy. With a nervous movement he threw a quick glance over his shoulder, as though expecting to find someone in the room. But it was empty. A shadow from the table-lamp spanned the ceiling like a black cloud

riding across the sky toward him. Somewhere in the flat a water-pipe was gurgling and hissing. The sound resembled laughter a long way off—and down.

And suddenly he felt very cold.

CHAPTER IV.

VERNON'S determination to hit back at the world was as firmly fixed when he rose the following morning after a few hours' unrefreshing sleep. It had, if possible, solidified in his mind and become part of his general equipment. He reflected agreeably on the task that lay before him, running over the points of his great offensive with a cool daylight intelligence. There were eight thousand pounds to be collected and then he would vanish. It would be farewell to London and his clever associates. When his fraud had been discovered, there would be an uproar in the papers, a stir in Scotland Yard, and a hue and cry. But before the arm of the law should reach him, he would have gone. His line of flight took him, in imagination, through Spain, across the Straits of Gibraltar to Tangier, and thence south into the desert, with perhaps Timbuctoo as the objective. Likely enough he would never reach there, for Morocco is an awkward country for the lonely traveller, especially if it comes to be known that there is money in his wallet. This consideration, however, did not weigh with Vernon, who never concerned himself with matters of personal safety. The future could look after itself. It was the present that needed attention.

Throughout breakfast he busied himself composing an attractive announcement for the *Times*. He sketched it out in a dozen forms. The difficulty was to find an effective start. "Buried Treasure," "Hidden Treasure," "Pirate's Hoard"—he tried them all and dismissed them all. Somehow they failed to strike the right note. He bit his pencil and the idea came to him in a flash. "Adventurers Wanted." That was the quality. Sketched out in block lettering it caught the eye—arrested the attention. After

that the task was easy. A word about the seventeenth-century map—hidden treasure—South Seas—and the thing was done. The line “small capital and deposit essential” was sandwiched between such alluring companions and sprinkled with such exciting possibilities that it never for a moment revealed the jaws of a trap.

Vernon smiled at the finished composition, crammed it in his pocket, called for his hat and stick, and went out.

At the advertising bureau at the *Times* office was a queue of men and women. Singularly unconscious of what was going on around him, Vernon filed up and waited his turn. He rather wished he had had a drink before coming in, for his throat felt sticky and ached and his fingers had developed a nervous twitch, like those of a man who is going off a very high dive for the first time. At the moment his turn came to hand the slip of paper to the clerk, a sudden doubt assailed him that he had made a mistake and muddled the text of his advertisement in such a manner as would inevitably reveal it to be a fraud. With a muttered apology he stepped away from the grille and hastily read over what he had written. There was no mistake—it was perfectly all right—as honest a piece of excitement as a man could wish to read. But how about that last line—“Correspond with V. W.”? Surely it was rank folly to give away his initials. But he had been over that point before and had decided in favour of doing so. V. W. was a fairly well-known man, and if one of the applicants should recognize him and find he was masquerading under an assumed name the fraud would be instantly exposed. But when exposure eventually came, as it inevitably would, Vernon wished it to be known that it was he who was responsible. The new false pride in him claimed this much of notoriety—to convince those who had tricked him that he himself could turn the tables and play a winning hand at their own game. The initials should remain—his identity should be fixed.

Vernon was not the only person in the *Times* office that morning whose behaviour was out of the ordinary. Among the crowd was a little old man who seemed equally reluctant

to conclude his business. He was a quaint little man with a small body and the thinnest possible legs. He had a large dome to his head, which was almost bald, and deeply sunk eye-sockets out of which a pair of very bright eyes twinkled restlessly. His hands, which were like a child's for smoothness and whiteness, were never still. In his left hand a wisp of paper fluttered, while the forefinger and thumb of his right hand moved in ceaseless revolutions one against the other. The little old man was making bread pills. It was his habit, his hobby, his invariable custom, a vice almost, and certainly a passion. When he had worked a pill to his complete satisfaction secretly and unobserved he would press it until it adhered to the under side of chairs and tables, into pieces of carving or mouldings. Sometimes years afterwards he would find an old pill and be very glad. In his jacket pocket he carried a new roll—not too crusty—from the heart of which he extracted the munitions of his sport. When one pill was finished and disposed of, he started on a second. Other men smoke cigarettes. These things are a matter of taste.

It was not his habit of making bread pills that drew attention to the little old man, but rather his appearance, his modesty, and a kind of shy nervousness which interfered with his capacity for getting his task done. He was forever stepping aside and giving his place to the next comer—for ever apologizing for being in front, and hastening to put himself behind. "No, no, really, I would wish you to go first." Then, darting back to the end of the queue, like a linnet on a perch:

"I want a few seeds, that's all, that's all."

He constantly piped this remark as though in extenuation for his reticence. Yet despite his piping and fluttering there was something oddly alert and attentive in his manner—a certain indefinable air of awareness to be remarked sometimes in persons with unnaturally good hearing. Every action seemed caught and registered by his bright twinkling eyes, and a response to every sound, however slight, rippled across his wrinkled cheeks like a puff of wind over a pool.

Smiling, innocent, attentive—he was here, there, everywhere, listening, peering and absorbing. There was not a soul in that office that had not come under the censorship of his bright, twinkling eyes—there was not a characteristic that he had not thoroughly mastered and for which in his own quiet way he had not found an explanation. His thoughts seemed to pierce the heads of complete strangers, and with uncanny insight solve the little riddles contained there.

But Vernon Winslowe puzzled him. A dozen times he had flicked his eyes over Vernon without finding an explanation for the mass of contradictions written on his features. Something in the set of Vernon's mouth and the droop of his brows mystified the curious little man very much indeed. He noticed the twitch of the hands and a roving restlessness in the pale blue eyes. He caught once a sudden over-shoulder glance that definitely betrayed alarm, or apprehension. It was all most complex and intriguing. The little man scratched his nose, fixed a well-rounded pill into an angle of ogee moulding, and peered afresh as Vernon read and re-read the sheet with its scrawl of words. No, he could find no possible excuse for the sly and malevolent expression which had been printed, as though with still wet ink, on a countenance every line and contour of which argued frankness, honesty and good intent. Of one thing he was very sure—the sinister expression was new to its wearer, for at present it only shaped his face and he had not lined it. Therefore it was a mask—a mask assumed for some purpose that he could not divine. Puzzling, perplexing, intriguing.

When Vernon Winslowe eventually rejoined the queue the little old man was immediately behind him, and when his turn came to hand his slip to the clerk the little old man was peeping under his arm at the written words. And when Vernon Winslowe put his money on the counter and without waiting for change hurriedly walked out of the office the little old man was only a few feet behind.

His intention to advertise for some seeds was quite forgotten.

In Fleet Street Vernon Winslowe got into a taxi—so did the little old man.

The first taxi deposited its fare at some chambers in Duke Street, St. James's. The second taxi passed by, with its passenger scribbling a number on his shirt cuff. It did not stop until it reached Jermyn Street.

“Do you want me any more?” said the driver.

The little old man shook his head a trifle sadly and answered:

“All I want is to be quite alone for a little while—quite, quite alone.”

So he entered the Geological Museum, where a man may find peace and solitude.

CHAPTER V.

IN the agony column of the *Times* of March 24 appeared the following:

“ADVENTURERS wanted for South Sea Treasure Hunt. Tremendous possibilities of a fortune. A 17th-century map is in the possession of the advertiser. The party will consist of eight, and those selected will be furnished with all details at a supper to be given at Voisin’s Restaurant, 11 P. M., the 28th inst. Age and sex no disqualification. Small capital and deposit essential. Correspond with V. W., Box 284.”

The advertisement was repeated in the news columns of several evening papers and was the subject of an article in a leading daily the following morning. The publicity was good. Within twenty-four hours millions of people had seen it. Business men read it aloud in suburban trains, laughed and looked out at the grey, changeless landscape with a new feeling of distaste. Schoolboys read it and thereafter acted strangely, bespeaking one another in the language of the sea, forming themselves into piratical bands and descending with violence upon unprepared foes. Many were the coal scoops which disappeared to be employed for strange purposes in back-yards. The bones of many a cat were as rudely disinterred as though they had belonged to a buried Pharaoh.

“Adventurers wanted for South Sea Treasure Hunt.” There was a magic in the phrase. It sounded “like a slow sweet piece of music from the grey forgotten years.”

It is hard to foretell the consequences of a few simple words in a newspaper. There was a drab woman in a Bermondsey slum very much a mother and very beaten as a wife. Not a happy woman, not, one had said, a kind. Her

life had been too much a prison for kindness to have place. Yet after reading she made a graceful tribute to freedom by opening the door of a blackbird's cage and setting its inmate free. Later she earned a black eye for the deed and counted it a cheap price to pay.

Draw a line through the word routine and you shall find a pathway to adventure. By the million processes of sight and sound and the prickings of understanding, by that thing we call distribution, those few lines written by an angry man in the dead of night stirred and knocked at and crept into the imaginations of men and women, bringing with them hope, courage, ambition, a bit of light, of fresh air, a taste of the sea—what you will. And into hundreds and hundreds of inkpots dipped hundreds and hundreds of pens held in hands that shook with a strange new excitement and a strange new sense of relief.

Letters written, rewritten, and written again—illiterate letters, wonderful letters, impossible, pitiâble letters—letters written never to be posted. Letters written by the angry, disappointed, venturesome, gay. Letters written by folk who by the very deed of writing set their spirits free of the shackles of restraint. A truly amazing mail, even though not one-tenth of it ever cost the writers a postage stamp. But, posted or unposted, the joy was theirs, the exquisite thrill of flirting with adventure and the true romance.

The actual number of letters received by V. W. at box 284 was one thousand one hundred and seventy-four. He borrowed a sack and took them away in a taxi.

Who shall say the spirit of adventure is dead?

Vernon did not attempt to wrestle with the huge cone of letters which he had emptied from the sack to the floor in his chambers. Perhaps he was afraid of surprising a note of poignant human suffering and desire for freedom. Eight he drew, haphazard, as a child draws parcels from a bran dip, and did little else than mark the names and addresses of their senders. The rest, with a sense of committing an unpardonable sin, he put upon the fire by twos and threes, by tens, dozens, and scores. When he had

finished, the grate was piled high with charred ambitions.

It was a hateful morning's work. As a precaution against any of the chosen eight deciding to withdraw after hearing the terms of the adventure, he retained six other letters which, unopened, were locked in a drawer of his bureau. Then he sat down to write his replies.

What he wrote was simple enough, a mere repetition of what had been said in the advertisement. An invitation to supper at Voisin's for the night following and a promise to explain then, at length and in detail, the terms of the enterprise, both from its capital and its adventurous side.

The replies were addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Morgan, of Bradford; to a lady called Lydia La Rue, of some West End flats, who wrote in characters so large that no more than ten or a dozen words appeared on any page; to Henry Julius, Esq., Broker, at an office in Threadneedle Street; to Miss Mary Ottery, of Merton; to Nurse Olive Banbury, of the Northern Cross Hospital; to Thomas Gates, Esq., and William Carpenter, Esq., of South Kensington and Walham Green. The envelopes were sealed, stamped and posted. The adventure had begun and he was committed.

His journey to the pillar-box was closely remarked by a pair of twinkling eyes which peered at him out of the shadow of the archway leading into Mason's Yard. Of this Vernon was unconscious, and had he seen the owner of those eyes it is unlikely he would have recognized the curious little man who, the morning before, had buzzed round him like a mosquito in the *Times* advertising bureau.

A surprise awaited him at the door of his chambers, in the person of a healthy, bronzed man about his own age, whose features were strangely reminiscent of some half-forgotten era of boyhood.

As Vernon stepped from the lift their eyes met.

"Vernon Winslowe," said the man. "Do you remember me?"

"Yes—no—I don't think so. Is there any reason why I should?"

"Think again."

"I'm terrible busy," said Vernon. "Do you want to see me about anything, because if you could leave it for a day or two——"

The stranger shook his head.

"I suppose I could leave it for a day or two," he said, "but I've no intention of doing so. Are you going to ask me in?"

Vernon turned the key in the lock and together they entered the flat.

"If it's important," he said, "come in by all means—but really I cannot remember where we met, and as I've a heap of work on hand——"

"A heap of work?"

"I said so."

"What sort of work?"

"Well, that's hardly——"

"My affair?"

"To be frank with you," Vernon replied, "I see no reason why I should confide in you."

"Perhaps I may be allowed to guess."

"To guess?"

The stranger nodded, drew from his pocket a copy of the *Times*, and said very simply:

"Adventurers wanted, eh, for exciting South Seas treasure hunt?"

Vernon started.

"How did you know?"

"Know! I guessed. I came across the announcement quite by accident and began to wonder if it had anything to do with a couple of scrubby lads who, a matter of twenty years ago, put in a thrilling afternoon's sport in the cellar of an old house in Cornwall."

Vernon gasped. "It's not Ralph Whittaker?"

"It certainly is," came the rejoinder. "And I must confess you've a devilish disagreeable way of greeting an old friend."

Vernon reached out and wrung him warmly by the hand.

"Gad, but this is extraordinary," he said. "You, eh?"

Ha! What a fluke! Why, it's seventeen years since last we met. It's good to see you again. You look fit, Ralph."

"Sorry I can't say the same for you," came the reply.

Vernon laughed, a shade unnaturally.

"Oh, rubbish," said he. "I'm right as the mail. Bit overworked lately, that's all. Help yourself to something—whisky, beer?"

Ralph Whittaker shook his head.

"I won't drink. I came on chance, hoping, if you were you, to have a chat. What's all this punk about hidden treasure?"

Vernon turned aside to a small table and helped himself to a cigarette.

"Punk," he repeated, "what do you mean?"

"This map? This South Sea Island stuff? Is it the old Roger Winslowe business? Because I thought when we foraged out those papers years ago we decided there was nothing in it. Tre—Tre—fusic—Trefusic Island, wasn't it? Where the old pirate marooned that chap who might have given him away. Is that the island, Vernon? I mean, is that what you're building this advertisement on?"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" said Ralph Whittaker, with a crinkled forehead. "But why, my dear fellar? Dash it, that log-book made the whole thing plain as a pike-staff. It was clear as daylight why that map was drawn up."

"Ah," said Vernon guardedly. "I know. But we were a couple of kids in those days, not old enough to see the possibilities in things. Their significances and all that. Since then I've been into this business thoroughly from a different point of view. Whatever I may have thought in the old days doesn't matter, because now I've a solid conviction there's money in it, Ralph. Pots of money! In fact, just as much money as one likes to take out of it."

He never intended to make that last remark. It slipped out with the careless candour of one schoolboy talking to another—with the easy confidence of established friendship.

But there is a wide difference between the judgments of

men and the judgments of boys, and with a sudden sense of something amiss, Ralph looked across the table into the face of his friend. What he saw transformed doubt into certainty. He rose and brought his fist down on the table.

“Vernon,” he cried, “Vernon, old man, you’re not going to tell me—this thing—this advertisement—is a stunt—a ramp. Why, good God, a fellar like yourself—a chap with your record. Damn it! You wouldn’t do a crooked thing?”

Vernon made no answer. His eyes were fixed on the lengthening ash of his cigarette. His mouth was set hard and thin.

Ralph crossed the room and put a hand on his shoulder.

“Look here,” he began gently, “I only got back to England last night—been coffee-growing in Nigeria since the war—and when I saw this in the paper this morning and guessed it had something to do with that old find of ours, I was just crazy with excitement. I came along post-haste. Found your name in the telephone-book and didn’t lose a moment. I knew you’d be inundated with offers, and I made up my mind on the strength of my connexion with the affair to be in the first eight. Seemed to me nothing in the world could be much more marvellous than a couple of old school-mates on a real live treasure hunt. But, damn it, Vernon, I can see by your looks the thing isn’t square. You’re—I don’t pretend to understand why—but you’re—what’s the game, old man?”

Vernon Winslowe made no attempt to reply for a long while. With rather a shaky forefinger he was drawing patterns on the table top. When his answer came it was pitilessly cold.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Sorry you came, Ralph. Though it was good to see you again. Good to know you are still alive. Good to shake hands with you. But your turning up now—your being here at this point—well, it’s a pity. I’m not going to excuse myself. I’m not going to tell you anything more than you know already—or guess. You accuse me of doing a crooked thing. I say you’re wrong, and that what I’m doing is right—is fair—is just. Don’t

ask me what I mean by that. I shouldn't tell you. I'm not going on this cruise blindfolded, or without a rudder, though I may not be steering according to regulations. Sometimes, you know, you can overdo regulations in life. Sometimes it's better to take a chance—to think a bit differently from other men—and ignore the book of rules for a game which I have found—honestly found isn't worth the playing. Don't imagine for one moment I am making excuses for myself. I'm not. I feel, for the first time in months, a terrible cold sanity and certainty that will gain nothing from the direction of other men. I've an object, Ralph. You may not agree with it—you probably wouldn't. Circumstances, perhaps, haven't given you any reason to agree with it. But I've an object and a determination that's going to take me clean through until I reach the goal I'm aiming at. This fluke of your turning up doesn't discourage me and doesn't dissuade me from the belief in the justice of what I intend to do. I'm sorry you're here, because I'd hate to quarrel with you, and am not going to quarrel with you. It was decent of you to come and bring back your old enthusiasm and want to share a corner in this adventure. But I may as well say straight out, there's no room for you. I like you—like you awfully—much too well to—to want you in this. I don't want anybody or anything that's likely to interfere with me and my intention. It hurts to say these things, but we used to be frank with one another as boys; as men I claim the same privilege. Well, then—that's about all. I've talked a lot without saying much, but, boiled down, it comes to this. I am sorry, old chap. Thanks very much, and good-bye."

Ralph Whittaker did not move.

"Boiled down," he replied coldly, "doesn't it come to this? That you're tackling something shady—something, it seems to you, I might upset, and as tactfully as possible you're telling me to get off the landscape?"

Vernon gave a half-laugh.

"I'm glad you admit the tact," he said.

"I admit it freely, but that's not to say I get off the

landscape, old friend. It seems to me I've turned up at just the right moment, and I should count myself something less than a friend if I failed to stand by."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that I am going to stop this thing, Vernon. That I am not going to allow you to go on with it. Is that understood?"

Vernon faced him.

"And how do you propose to prevent me?"

"Very simply. Either you give me your promise to ignore every answer to that advertisement——"

"You lose," Vernon cut in. "The letters have already been posted."

"So! Then either you send a batch of wires to the effect that you have been unable to mature your plans, or—or——"

"Or?"

"I put an advertisement in to-morrow's issue of the *Times* warning people that this treasure hunt is a rank swindle."

"Somehow," said Vernon Winslowe slowly, "I don't think so."

"Buy a paper and see."

"I shall see nothing," was the reply. "Ralph, do you remember the evening after we found the old chest—how you and I went down to the summer-house at the garden end and talked into the night?"

"Perfectly."

"And do you remember the old schoolboy form of oath—never to speak a word of our find to a living soul—'See it wet, see it dry, cut my throat if I lie'?"

"Well, what of it?"

"What, indeed! I seem to recall you and me pledging undying faith to one another in those terms, and I am pretty certain that oath was just as sacred as if it had been taken with a Testament in the right hand before a two-shilling commissioner."

Ralph Whittaker shut his fists. "You mean?"

"I mean," said Vernon Winslowe, "that where a promise

has been given between pals, I find it difficult to see any reason why it should be broken, except with the consent of both parties. Of course," he added, "if you think differently, there is no more to be said."

"But, dash it, man," said Ralph, "you tie my hands."

"You tied them yourself twenty years ago."

"And you want me to stand by and see you do a rotten thing?"

"I don't ask you to look."

Ralph Whittaker stood indecisively for a moment, then turned and picked up his hat and stick.

"God!" he said, and walked towards the door.

"I am terribly, terribly sorry," said Vernon.

"With reason," came the answer.

Then the door slammed.

The whole of that afternoon and the evening that followed, Vernon Winslowe drank whisky by himself. He drank a bottle and a half of whisky, and he went to bed sober—desperately, pitiably sober.

CHAPTER VI.

HE rose next morning with a head that was buzzing like a sawmill, flung open the window, and looked out. It was one of those keen, clean March days that herald in the spring with a chase of riding clouds, with bursts of white sunlight and blue shadow; one of those days when youth comes tingling through our winter veins, when a lightness finds its way into our steps and into our hearts, when the blackened twigs put on a livery of green, when birds sing and fight and mate, and window-curtains look grubby for the first time, and old men whistle as they go to work, and furs are put in camphor and overcoats thrown aside, and the world seems to have had its face bathed in sunlight and its nostrils filled with the scent of growing flowers.

But Vernon Winslowe hated the day, the sunlight, the happy, coatless throngs, the polish and dazzle of the motors that flicked along the street beneath him.

He hated and resented it, longed for a fog, for rain, for any mood of the elements to adjust itself to the sullen humour of his mind. The detestable innocence and gaiety of the day affronted him. He hated it the more because there was no sort of employment by which he could distract himself from these angry thoughts. There was nothing to do until the fateful meeting at Voisin's Restaurant at 11 P.M. that night. A whole day to be futile and angry in. A God-given day that breathed jollity and good intent. A hateful day. How to spend it?

He dropped back on the bed, ripped open a batch of bills, and tore them across. Lord, how his head ached! Then his fool of a man knocked and entered, bringing coffee and scrambled eggs. Detestable meal! He sent it away, and

ordered a pot of tea and a siphon. Inside his head a madman was playing on a drum—valves were opening and shutting—needles of pain were pricking the backs of his eyes. He sat up, gulped down a mouthful of tea, and tumbled into a bath. The shock of the cold water made his head worse, much worse. Then someone rang him up on the telephone, and he had to stoop to answer it. It was like hell, that stooping, and his response to the man at the other end of the wire was sulphurous. Vernon flung down the receiver and took his head in his hands. The room was swinging rhythmically.

“This won’t do,” he said, pressing his thumbs into his temples. “This won’t do. I’ll never get through with the job if I’m in this state.”

He returned to the bedroom, where his man had laid out a Lovat tweed on the bed. Its colour was a festive green. For the first time in his life Vernon Winslowe shrieked.

“Duncan! Duncan, you almighty fool.” Then, when the man came in, pointing at the suit, he said: “Take that filthy thing away, give it away—chuck it away.”

“I thought, sir, being spring,” the man began.

“Spring be blowed!” said Vernon. “Get me a grey suit—dark grey—and chuck that infernal spotted tie into the paper-basket. Good Lord, haven’t you any sense! A black tie—and not that shirt. It isn’t a fair—I’m not a Christie Minstrel. Where are your wits? A white shirt.”

He viciously kicked a pair of very brown brogues under the bed and pointed with a trembling finger at a sombre pair of black shoes.

“Any bromo-seltzer in the place?”

“No, sir; but I can easily——”

“Oh, get a taxi!” said Vernon.

When he went out five minutes later, he forgot the taxi that was standing at the door. Duncan settled with the man some two hours later—expensively.

The white sunlight so dazzled him that he walked with one hand covering his eyes, and rudely cursed two passers-by with whom he collided.

His case calling for immediate treatment, he repaired to a certain chemist in a turning off Coventry Street who possesses an almost international fame for dealing with the emergencies of life in the West End. This suave and ingratiating person greeted Vernon with tokens of welcome and respect. Bowing over a counter, seasonably dressed with mossy nests containing soap eggs, he begged to be advised in what manner he could be of aid.

Vernon did not disguise the truth.

"I feel like the devil," he said. "Drank a bottle and a half of whisky last night and didn't get tight."

The excellent chemist received the tidings with a smile which in itself exonerated his patient from blame.

"Is that so, sah!" he said. "I quite see, sah."

And while he was preparing a potion:

"A delightful day, sah."

"Perfectly foul," said Vernon.

"Just so, sah. I shall improve it. Now, quite still, while I treat the eyes."

And this he did with a camel-hair brush and the most delicate touch in the world. The result was electrifying. The discs of orange and green which from the moment of rising that morning had slowly and agonizingly revolved before Vernon's field of vision were instantly dispelled. The wax-like face of his healer, complete with a blond moustache so perfect in form that it might have been purchased off a card at a wig-maker's, appeared out of a mist which heretofore had obscured it. A few drops of fluid on the crown of the head, a glass of foaming liquid which looked like effervescing blood, a spray of something magically cool directed at the nape of his neck, a sniff of prussic acid, a breeze deliciously wafted from a palm-leaf fan, and his troubles were at an end.

He found himself on the pavement of that turning off Coventry Street rejuvenated, restored to health, and in a spirit of profound gratitude. Nor was this all, for so complete was his recovery that, for the moment, his anger and resentment were lulled, and there ran through his veins a

desire to live gloriously for a few hours before facing what the future might hold in store. So he turned into Scott's, and lunched discreetly off half a lobster and a pint of Chablis, and thereafter climbed to the top deck of a west-going omnibus and made his way down to the Queen's Club, where the University sports were in progress.

The crowd was marvellous—the sunlight marvellous—and the spirit of the competitors more marvellous still. The extraordinary infection of sport seized Vernon even as he passed the turnstile. Competitor and onlooker alike were at their best. The world of every day was forgotten in the supreme emergency of taking sides and winning for the side. The great arena was a pool into which flowed the forces of energy, pluck, determination and the will to win.

Vernon Winslowe's spirit went out to these magnificent young men and was captured by them. He cheered himself silly at the Balliol first string who won the high jump at five eleven and a half, then put himself at six foot one and cleared it. He saw the quarter run in record time—saw the herculean effort of the last man which took him clean through the field to the first place, to break the tape and fall, dead almost, into the arms of his glorying supporters. The roar that went up. The bursting of the crowd on to the field, fighting for the honour of touching any part of this super-youth, who lay with a drawn grey face struggling for breath, insensible to everything but the sheer physical pain of victory.

He saw the little exultant male parent, the father of this boy, an absurd man with an umbrella, and a velvet collar to his coat—a shrewd man, one had said, a difficult man to deal with in business, belike, and haply a nasty-natured man. He saw that he was crying for very pride of his son's exploit—blubbering and lashing out with his umbrella to carve a way through the crowd and get down on his knees beside the gasping hero.

A record had been broken. A fifth of a second gained on the best time. What did it matter? Where was its importance? Why should total strangers gulp and sniff and shake

hands with each other and mind so much and feel exalted, uplifted? What did it matter? Where was the sublimity of this act that it should wring people's hearts and make them roar and make them glad and mad? Why, there was not a shoe-lace in the oldest pair of shoes, not a box of matches, a postage stamp, a necktie, an umbrella rib, in the possession of all that mighty crowd that was not of greater service to mankind than running the quarter in a fifth of a second less than the record time.

What was it, then, so to infect the imagination and inspire? And the answer came as though spoken by a voice inside his head. "Pride of achievement." Yes, that was it, pride of achievement. To keep one's "light so shining a little ahead of the rest," to make one's best a little better than any precedent best. And, to come to Kipling again: to "hold on when there is nothing in you except the will that says to you hold on." Pride of achievement that has won wars, steered ships, and made nations. And this was the world and these the people Vernon Winslowe had condemned as wicked and predatory and vile.

He looked up and saw on the big grand stand a diadem of glistening eyes, a curtain of smiles and flushed faces, and, dropping his head, he said to himself:

"I don't think I can be wanted much in this company," and he went out.

At the turnstile he bumped into a man, and recognized Dillon.

"Good Lord, it's V. W. ! I'm dreadfully sorry, old chap, but I slipped into my chambers just after I met you and picked up a telephone call from that girl I told you I was lunching with. She couldn't come, so I popped into a train and went down to Sandwich for a couple of days' golf. Clean forgot that tenner. Here you are." He dragged a note from his pocket and thrust it into Vernon's hand. "See you later," and he was gone.

Vernon Winslowe stood without moving. The note burned his fingers like a live coal.

Was the world vile? Was it? Was it?

CHAPTER VII.

SUPPER had been ordered for eleven o'clock. Vernon Winslowe had rung up Voisin's Restaurant the day before and made his arrangements. A private room or suite of reception rooms, not too much to eat, but plenty to drink and good—yes, it was to be a sit-down supper—he did not want people wandering about—but of a light character—he did not want them to become torpid with food. Caviare—*pâté de foie*—a mayonnaise, perhaps, and a few attractive sweets for the ladies. A good fire, and not too much light in the room. And it was to be understood, should any members of the Press put in an appearance and ask questions, no answers were to be given.

Vernon then read over the names of his expected guests—caused them to be repeated and a list made.

“No one else is to be admitted on any pretext whatever,” he said.

“*Bien, m'sieur.* It is understood—*parfaitement.*”

And yet at a quarter to eleven, when the *maître d'hôtel* was supervising the final arrangements and putting a deft touch here and there to the table, the door of the Ambassador's Room was opened, and a girl dressed in a felt hat and a long mackintosh came in with every air of assurance.

The girl, whose name was Averil Chester, was attractive—unusually so. She was neither too tall nor too short. Her head was set solidly on her shoulders—her features were clean-cut and perfectly proportioned. Her eyes, dark-lashed and large, were wide apart—laughing eyes, although for the moment the laughter in them seemed to be under some restraint. There was an odd contraction about her brows, a sharpness which robbed them of a natural tendency to be arched. Her mouth was sweet and firm—tender and deter-

mined—a crimson, healthy mouth. What of her hair was visible beneath the pulled-down felt hat proved itself to be dark and wavy, and shone where the light caught it with unlooked-for glints of red. She stood in the open doorway, pulling off her gloves and surveying the room with an air of ownership. Bright specks of rain glistened on the shoulders of her mackintosh, for the day, with the falling of the sun, had fallen from grace, and its promise of spring had been shattered with a drizzle of cold rain and a wisp of fog.

“Good evening,” she said to the *maître d’hôtel*, and walked boldly into the middle of the room. “This is where the party is being held, I suppose.”

M. Bendigo bowed, but remembered his instructions. The visitor’s modest attire was hardly suggestive of a guest at Voisin’s Restaurant.

“*Mais oui, mademoiselle*. You are one of m’sieur’s guests?”

Averil shook her head.

“So! Then I cannot understand—M’sieur Vernon Winslowe gave strict instructions that no one was to be permitted to enter without a letter of invitation.”

At the mention of Vernon’s name, Averil started imperceptibly. She was at pains, however, to conceal her surprise. The coincidence of V. W. of the *Times* advertisement turning out to be Vernon Winslowe of the hunting-field, and a man she knew intimately by sight, complicated the task she had set about to accomplish. But it was too late now to retreat.

Averil pulled off her other glove and nodded.

“That’s all right,” she said. “There will be some ladies among the guests to-night. Mr. Winslowe wants me to look after them.”

“But the *femme de chambre*——”

“He prefers employing his own private servants.”

M. Bendigo relaxed. He had not realized mademoiselle was of the household of monsieur. The small room on the right was prepared for the reception of the ladies. There

was a fire—some powder and pins. If anything else was required, mademoiselle had but to ask.

Averil thanked him, entered the adjoining room, took off her hat, folded up her mackintosh, and put on a little black apron and a mob cap, which she so pulled down over her brow as almost to conceal her eyes. To increase the change in her looks, she fluffed out her hair over her ears. It commonized her.

In the larger room M. Bendigo was still fussing round the supper table. It was clear he thought Averil attractive, and hoped for further converse. In this respect she was at no pains to gratify him. Her only reason for returning to the supper room was to ascertain whether or no there was a telephone. There was. It stood on a small table beneath the window, but so long as that man was present there was no chance of using it. That was a pity, for she had promised to ring up Fleet Street if her plan for gaining admission to the party succeeded. Here was a matter of pride rather than of importance. Several reporters from other newspapers had been turned away at the doors. Youngly enough, she wanted to underline her success.

“I should like some lavender water for the dressing-table,” she said.

The tiresome M. Bendigo touched a bell and told a waiter to bring some. The hope of getting the room to herself was not realized. Meanwhile, M. Bendigo asked questions.

He assumed that the evening's events were to do with the recent advertisement in the *Times*. He presumed that monsieur had a map, and that the guests were those who would take part in the treasure hunt.

“Mr. Winslowe does not like his staff to talk,” said Averil.

“Ah, the lure of hidden treasure!” exclaimed the Frenchman, as it were plucking the words from his mouth with both hands. “’S a wonderful thing. From the boy we never outgrow it. The adventure, eh! Spanish gold! It’s got the——”

“Will you tell your cloak-room attendant she won’t be

wanted?" said Averil, and returned to the inner room, closing the door after her.

With a shrug of disappointment M. Bendigo turned away at the precise moment Vernon Winslowe entered.

Vernon was carrying a leather dispatch case and an evening coat was thrown across his shoulder. The usual healthy tan of his skin had faded to white, and he was gnawing nervously at his lower lip. His brows were down, and beneath them his eyes moved restlessly, switching from place to place as though he were expecting to be attacked from every corner simultaneously. To the greeting from the *maître de hôtel* he offered no reply. When he spoke, it was like a man speaking to himself.

"No one here." A glance at his watch. "Early yet. Table looks all right. Serve the soup when I ring, then we'll forage for ourselves. Take this hat and coat. Shan't want that centre light. Show the people up as they arrive. Any brandy and soda? This room feels very cold—no, don't bother. The commissionaire has the list all right? What's that music?"

From the restaurant below came the strains of a band playing a sorrowful melody.

M. Bendigo explained from whence the sounds came, and Vernon drew a Bradbury from his pocket. It was one of his last, for as a sop to his conscience he had spent the earlier part of the evening discharging debts with the remnant of his fortune.

"Give this to the bandmaster and ask him for heaven's sake to play something cheerful. Yes, and do it now."

M. Bendigo went out, and Vernon took from his pocket a handkerchief and mopped his forehead. Then he stood for a moment with his eyes shut and with lips that moved slowly to a line of verse—a line that had been haunting him—and rhythmically dinning in his ears for many hours.

"So some of him lived, but most of him died." Yes, and it was only the part which had died that deserved to live. "Honour and faith and a good intent——"

When he opened his eyes Averil was standing a few paces away.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I heard the door, and I thought someone had arrived."

He answered confusedly.

"What—I don't see——"

"The ladies' wraps, sir. I'm——"

"Oh, yes, yes."

She turned as if to retire. Something in the shape of her chin—the tilt of her head—the manner in which she walked, stirred a sudden memory in him.

"Wait," he said. "I seem to—— Haven't I seen you before?"

"Have you?"

"You remind me of someone. Didn't you——? No, no. I don't see how you could have done. It's queer, though. Eerie almost." His thoughts flashed to the hunting photograph which only the day before he had pitched into the grate—the photograph of the girl who was looking down with that alive, laughing face at—at Sullivan. It was uncanny.

"I shall believe I am seeing ghosts," he said. Then: "How long have you been at this restaurant?"

"Not long."

"And before that?"

"I was at a place in Fleet Street."

He accepted that—flashed another glance at her.

"I want a drink," he said.

"There's a drink table in the room to the left, sir. And some smokes—Virginian and Turkish."

She said it commonly, with a lilting London twang. It was a shop-girlish inflexion admirably tuned to drive away the impression which had formed in Vernon's mind.

He gave a jerky laugh and turned away, saying as he went:

"Ring through to the hall porter, d'you mind, and ask him if he has the list of my guests all right."

She was glad of the opportunity, and picked up the re-

ceiver as he passed through to the room on the left to busy himself with a decanter and a siphon.

Averil made a cradle round the mouthpiece of the telephone and spoke softly:

“Fleet 8000. Yes. That the *Courier*? Editorial department, please. Hullo! Mr. Frenkle! Averil Chester speaking. I’ve got it all right, and I think it looks like a very good story.”

Vernon came back with a tumbler in his hand.

“That’s quite all right, sir,” she said. “He has the list.”

He took no notice, and for the first time she saw how terribly white and drawn he was. And with the sight, although she could not tell why, came a sudden distaste for the adventure she had undertaken and the deceit she was practising.

It was a thought common to both, and for that reason they shirked meeting each other’s eyes. They were looking ashamedly at the pattern of the carpet, when the door was opened and a waiter announced:

“Mr. Henry Julius.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was no room for doubt as to the nationality of Henry Julius. He was a pure Jew, but not of the type that features as a form of humorous diet for readers of illustrated papers and the audiences of music halls. On the contrary, Henry Julius was an extremely handsome man with highly sensitized emotions. His age was thirty-seven, and about him was the air of knowledge acquired at a cost. His features were clean-cut and balanced to a point of perfection—his hair was like a silk cap—his skin clear and olive, and his mouth would have brought renown to a Grecian statue. He filled his clothes faultlessly, and they were faultless clothes, much too faultless. An unbroken knife-edge line ran down his trouser-legs as it were, conveying the attention by the most direct route to an effulgent pair of patent leather shoes, which shone like suns. Chief among the arresting features of this arresting personality were his eyes. His eyes were singularly limpid and bright. They were brown eyes, with a golden band circling the pupils. The whites were a clear pale blue of almost virginal purity. To look into his eyes one would say: "Here is a man who has never been guilty of even the slightest excess."

A catalogue of Henry Julius's possessions and attractions would be incomplete without a word about his hands—hands so small and white and exquisitely manicured as to resemble a woman's. In common with many others of his race, Henry Julius talked with his hands, but never ridiculously. He possessed that rare talent of using them to paint in the gaps which occur in dialogue—a talent which in a large measure redeemed a certain fundamental commonness and over-polish in his speech. He spoke fluently and to the point,

but his words did not ring true like good coin. There was a velvety quality in the sounds he made—a nap—like the nap on the surface of felt.

He came into the room briskly—with an air—handing his hat to the waiter and flicking into it a pair of white kid gloves. Then forward, with hand extended and a smile that expressed complete confidence of welcome.

To the waiter who announced him he said: “Half a minute,” and arrested his exit with a gesture. To Vernon he said: “Mr. Winslowe, delighted! I came early, hoping for a private word before the others arrive.” Averil he favoured with a smile which at once patronized and dismissed her.

She accepted her dismissal and went out.

“May I tell this joker to keep your guests downstairs till we’re through with our business?”

“As to that,” Vernon replied, “I did not know we had any business that is not in common with the rest.”

Henry Julius produced a gold watch, biscuit-thin, with a jewelled monogram on the face cover. After the fashion of a conjurer performing a successful “experiment,” he touched a spring and the face opened.

“It’s now five to,” he said. “Let us say till the hour strikes.”

The reply was discouraging.

“What I have to say I propose saying when everyone is present.”

Henry Julius ignored the obstacle and turned to address the waiter:

“Keep ’em downstairs till eleven o’clock.”

The man went out—speeded by a gesture.

“Splendid! I’ll come straight to the point.”

The point was a simple one—a plain, practical point. If Vernon Winslowe was in possession of a map and had reason to believe that it would lead to the discovery of a great treasure, why did he not go and find it himself without dragging a number of other people into the deal?

Vernon disposed of the query without difficulty.

“Capital—no capital.”

Point number two. Capital could be obtained—on guarantees—from a single source. Where was the virtue of raising it in dribblets from eight investors instead of one?

Vernon agreed that the objection was reasonable enough.

“But, as it happens,” he concluded, “it was my wish that this cruise should combine business and pleasure. I have no other answer.”

Henry Julius spun a chair neatly and bestrode it after the fashion of an eighteenth-century gallant. He was very decorative in all his movements. He put his head on one side engagingly.

“Assuming you have a genuine map and assuming the treasure is still there, what’s it worth?”

Vernon smelt the steel of a trap.

“It would be obviously impossible to say,” he replied.

Julius clapped a hand on the chair-back.

“Sensible! If you’d named a figure, I should have called you a liar.”

“And if you had,” Vernon returned, “I should have knocked you down.”

It was curious how the coming of this acquisitive and inquisitive person had revived his distemper. The mere fact that the first bite at the bait should be from a man who was obviously clever and obviously out to make a bit at the expense of anyone else seemed to lend justice to the occasion. In Henry Julius he saw a typification of those shrewd and predatory qualities which had brought about his ruin. The growing sense of uncertainty and unrest which for the last few hours had attacked him so bitterly was being lulled into insensibility by contact with this man. If this was a sample of what might be expected as a result of the advertisement, why, then there seemed no very good reason to repent the course he had taken. Like many other persons cast in a naturally simple mould, Vernon was a poor hand at concealing his emotions, and the face he presented to his guest was the face of an angry man.

Henry Julius took his own reading of these evidences of anger and secretly rejoiced in them.

“Temper,” he said, “is a sign of sincerity. But, my dear sir, I accept no man’s word as a persuasive argument. I deal in proofs. Can you supply them?”

“Not the sort of proofs likely to satisfy you.”

“Don’t be too sure. I go a lot by impressions, and you’ve impressed me. How much capital do you want?”

“About ten thousand—possibly less.”

Henry Julius looked at the ceiling.

“This expedition,” he said, “attracts me. There’s a pictorial side, and it appeals to my pictorial sense. What does not attract me is the ninth share in a treasure I might divide.”

“Divide?”

“With you! Now suppose I took a chance and offered to come in fifty-fifty. No, let me go on. Send a message to the hall porter that you’re ill and can’t entertain your guests as arranged—then you and me——”

With lightning speed he outlined a form of contract between them, in every clause of which a trip wire was cleverly concealed for the feet of his future partner. He was proceeding gaily, when Vernon cut him short.

“I don’t think so,” he said.

“But why not?”

“In the first place, because I’ve given my word eight people should be on this cruise—not two.”

“Your word,” said Julius. “But there was nothing in writing.”

Vernon went on:

“Added to that, I haven’t cash enough to stand half the expenses, and, finally, I am confident you and I would find each other’s undiluted society for several months hard to bear.”

“But I like you very well,” said Henry Julius.

“Thanks very much.”

“What if I offered to lend you the money?”

Vernon jerked back his head and laughed.

“Note of hand alone, eh?” he queried. “Any sum from ten to ten thousand! No, I don’t think so. If you’re for this trip, Julius, you must line up with the rest and take equal chances.”

Henry Julius shrugged his shoulders.

“You’re making a great mistake.”

“It won’t be my first,” said Vernon, and bowed, as the door opened, to welcome the next guest.

As a matter of fact there were two, and they were both women. François, the waiter, gave their names as:

“Miss Lydia La Rue—Miss Mary Ottery.”

The difference between these women was extraordinarily marked, for whereas Lydia La Rue was magnificent, statuesque and scarlet, Mary Ottery was insignificant, transparent and grey. A little mouse of a woman was Mary, with her small grey face and the grey dress and thin, grey-gloved hands. There was something mouse-like, too, about the nervous way she peeped round the lintel of the door as though at the slightest sound she would bolt noiselessly into the dark whence she had come. Her hair was drawn back tightly from rather a high forehead and secured in a small knot at the nape of her neck. She wore silver pince-nez, through which a pair of wide-set and unexpectedly courageous eyes peered inquiringly. Her nose was rather large and prominent—its prominence being heightened by the hollows of her cheeks. Her lips were thin and tightly compressed.

In absolute contrast were the features and form of Lydia La Rue. She carried her head high on a splendid pair of shoulders, the perfect symmetry of which was undisturbed by strap or sleeve. The tapered fingers of one hand were spread effectively upon her hip, and over the crook of her arm hung a cloak of sapphire blue. From the other hand dangled a vanity bag fashioned to the likeness of a mighty tea rose. She wore a clinging gown in some fine shade of jade green which emphasized the lines of her figure. Her oval face, which was framed in a magnificent auburn *coiffure*, was dead white, and her lips were scarlet as a berry. Hers

was a sensuous mouth with its curved, intolerant upper lip and its full moist lower lip. A brave, thoughtless and desirable mouth—too desirable to be other than unkind. Her eyes were set very close together and tilted up at the corners in the direction of meanness.

It is rarely that two such complete opposites as Mary Ottery and Lydia La Rue can be seen at a single glance. It is something of a revelation when it happens. There was once a man who wrote about women, and, being unafraid of committing himself to generalities, he divided the sex into two classes—women who see and women who feel. Here is a quotation from this temerous person's work:

"The statement of the type to which they belong is written clearly and beyond confusion in a woman's eyes and a woman's mouth. Look for the straight-lidded, steady, fearless eyes of the woman who thinks, absorbs and understands through the medium of sight, and look again for the full, red, petulant mouth of the woman who thinks with her senses and has acquired what much or little she may have learnt of the book of life from what is printed upon her lips."

Whatever may be the truth or fallacy of the above quotation, it is certain these two women—the grey and scarlet—the timid and the brazen—supplied an eccentrically accurate illustration of the theory. The illustration was emphasized by their greetings of Vernon.

Said Lydia La Rue:

"Which of you two is Vernon Winslowe?"

And when he came forward:

"Ha! Good. I like your type."

Since Vernon did not reciprocate the liking, he made haste to introduce her to Henry Julius. Lydia declined Averil's invitation to take her cloak with a dropped eyebrow, and inspected the radiant personality of the Jew. Her remark to him may have been accidentally insolent:

"Are you one of the chosen?"

"I beg your pardon," said Henry, and drew himself up to his full height, which in the circumstances was not quite high enough.

“For this trip?” said Lydia, with a short laugh.

Henry Julius did not trust himself to reply. He prided himself on being polite and rather irresistible to women. He contented himself by leaning forward and staring at the string of pearls which circled Lydia’s throat. Then he pursed his lips and turned away with an infinitesimal lift of the shoulders. Remarking the flush on her cheeks which followed this tacit criticism, he justly felt that they were quits.

Meanwhile, Mary Ottery was, so to speak, stumbling over her own nervousness in the doorway. She mistook the motive of Vernon’s outstretched hand for an immediate demand for the twenty-five pounds’ deposit required according to the terms of the letter he had written.

“Oh, yes, I have it with me,” she gasped, fumbling with the strings of her bag. “It’s here, if I can only get it out. I tied the knot rather tight to be on the safe side.”

Vernon protested that nothing was farther from his thoughts than to collect the deposit so urgently.

“You’ve heard nothing about the expedition yet,” said he.

“Oh, but I’ve quite made up my mind to come,” she hastened to assure him. “That is, of course, if you’ll let me.”

Something pathetic in the eagerness of this little grey woman plucked at his slackened heart-strings.

“You’ve the adventurous spirit,” said he, and handed her over to Averil, who suggested powder and a little lavender water.

“I never use powder,” said Mary, “but some lavender water would be rather nice. It is when one’s excited—one’s nose somehow!”

Averil led her into the inner room.

Vernon followed the two women thoughtfully with his eyes until his attention was distracted by Henry Julius plucking at his sleeve.

“Mr. Winslowe, surely, surely, surely!”

“Well?”

“A woman like that on a show of this kind?”

“I sincerely hope so,” said Vernon.

“Then in my opinion you must be mad.”

The hot retort this remark would surely have inspired was cut short by a new influx of guests. There were four, and they bunched awkwardly in the doorway. In front was a fat little man and his fat little wife. They were florid, breathless and perspiring. Also they seemed a little rattled with the occasion and with each other. The little fat man was goading the little fat woman forward, as it were, prompting her footsteps and acting as a finger-post for her mind. Their coming was preluded with the words:

“Here, mind that mat, mother,” spoken in a rich Midland accent, marred for the moment by a note of irritation.

Of all the accents in the world there is none kinder, more homely and comforting than a Midland accent, always assuming that the speaker is at good nature with the world. It has about it a ripeness and cordiality that even the rich Devon burr cannot rival. It is the natural accent of the host—of the man of substance—of the genial, warm-hearted man. It is an accent that would seem to sit at the head of a high-tea table and preside over Yorkshire hams, cuddle crusts and speckly brown eggs. It is an accent you can trust. But, rob it of its natural calm and so contrive that your Midlander is at variance with himself and his situation, and you shall find a very different music in your ears—music dissonant as a police rattle.

Mr. Joshua Morgan, of Bradford City, and his wife, Kate Morgan, had some excuse for being keyed up and snappy with each other on this particular night. Their coming marked the first step in a terrific adventure and a departure from the routine of thirty working years. From being steady sober swimmers in the stiff stream of life they had, in a moment of unprecedented madness and for no better cause than a few tempting lines in a daily paper, plunged head-first into a maelstrom which every argument of common sense would point to avoiding. The ties and responsibilities of home, family and business had been severed at a single coup. It was absurd—unheard of, grotesque—but with eyes open they had done it. Two nights

before, Kate Morgan had been knitting a vest for a yet unborn generation, when Joshua came back from the shop, slapped down a newspaper cutting on her fat knee, and said:

“Have a look at yon.”

Kate Morgan had a look, and when she raised her eyes they were glistening in a manner barely decent in a good woman of fifty-nine years of age with children at boarding-school, a married daughter, and two sons in the business. Kate Morgan had never wandered farther afield than Blackpool sands, but in her eyes the wanderlust was written plain.

“Now don’t excite yourself,” said Joshua. “Draw me a glass of beer, and let’s sit down and have a talk.”

Nine forty-five was their usual time for retiring, for they were early-up folks, but clocks were striking three when eventually they made their way to bed.

“Kate, us’ve earned a holiday,” Joshua said. They were his first words when he came back from posting the fateful letter. And she replied:

“But how about that chance of you being in Borough Council next ’lection?”

“Hang Borough Council,” said Joshua very emphatically indeed.

In all the thirty years of their partnership they had never been more intimate than on that night. In face of the terrific hazard which was contemplated, they clung to each other for mutual support. Perhaps that was why Joshua slept with an arm round his wife’s neck and why, although its position greatly interfered with the flow of blood to her brain, she would rather have perished than ask him to remove it.

Years of hard business struggle for existence—the bringing up of a large family, with its inevitable concomitant of labour, had denied them the opportunity of getting on familiar terms with the kinder side of each other’s natures. There had been no time for gentleness, and even when some small measure of fortune and success rewarded them, the habit of work, work, work was so deeply ingrained that it

was impossible to escape from it and relax. Wherefore those springs of sympathy and human kindness which had existence in both of them through pressure of toil were still untapped. They knew each other as two halves of a piece of domestic machinery, but spiritually were more or less unacquainted.

Joshua Morgan accepted Vernon's hand with a kind of defensive gesture.

"We've come," he said, bringing down his bushy eyebrows, "but don't go jumping to conclusion that we've committed ourselves. Ah'm a business man not to be taken in by a lot of fandango. We're here to inspect land, and that's long and short of it. Mother, shake hands with Mr. Winslowe."

"M' glove's stuck," said Kate, struggling to get it off.

"Comes of getting a size too small. It's vanity."

"No," came the tart rejoinder. "It's perspiration. Now it's split, and that's your fault."

Joshua ignored this accusation.

"Us is a bit late, but missus wouldn't be satisfied to come straight from station. Must needs unpack and get into silk."

"And who'd have first to grumble if I'd disgraced you?"

"How many times," demanded Joshua, "have I spoke to you about back-answering in public?"

To which Kate Morgan, seeing no advantage in giving the required number, replied:

"Your tie's up again—it'll be over your collar in a minute."

Vernon Winslowe avoided the risk of becoming involved in a domestic upheaval by transferring his attention to his two other guests, whose entrance had been rather eclipsed by the round Midlanders.

The first was an immense young man with ink upon his fingers which industrious rubbing with pumice stone had failed to remove. For his size and stature he seemed to be very ill at ease.

“I didn’t catch your name,” said Vernon.

“William Carpenter,” was the reply, barely coherent owing to a nervous affection of the throat.

William Carpenter was always clearing his throat. He cleared it before and during everything he said. His nervousness was further emphasized by the roundness of his shoulders, and by a pair of very large hands which hung at his sides as though, having brought them out, he could find no use for them, and heartily wished he had left them at home, where they would not get in his own and everyone else’s way. The dress-suit he wore was baggy and not altogether successful. It looked as though it were ashamed of being a dress-suit, and would very gladly be transformed into an honest tweed. It was clearly evident William Carpenter had had trouble with the centre stud of his shirt-front, a trouble which a person interested in investigation might hazard had occurred before his fingers had had their engagement with the pumice stone. Of the white tie he wore there could be no two views. Even the least censorious would have been compelled to admit that it was a failure, and that he would have done better to have gone in for a ready-made.

But whatever sartorial criticisms might be passed against William Carpenter, none could deny that he possessed many rare features to offset them. For example, he was simple, trusting and honest to a fault. These qualities were written in every line of his face. He was in his wrong element; nothing else was amiss. He should not have been in those clothes, or in that company, nor should Fate have allowed so magnificent a physical specimen to be no more than a humble clerk in the G.P.O. Here was a man who belonged to the open air cramped and cribbed behind the grille of a local post office. Where there should have been a straight back, was a bent; where there should have been earth on bronzed hands, was ink on putty-coloured fingers. He was a clear example of nature’s miscasting.

William was a type with whom Vernon Winslowe was unfamiliar—their paths in life, service and clerical, had no

point of convergence, if one excepts the war, where men of every station and degree were inextricably tangled one with the other. But in the war a common cause and a common uniform robbed the individual of individuality and begat a general sameness. Vernon knew little or nothing about the mighty army of 9 A.M. to 6.30 P.M. workers whose battalions, composed of omnibus units, tunnelling companies advancing underground and infantry pouring over the bridges from the south, daily invade the City of London to be swallowed up by the nation's great grey barracks of industry. This fact notwithstanding, the hulking, awkward young man made an instant appeal to Vernon, even as, in larger measure, Mary Ottery had appealed to him and in a smaller measure the Morgans had made their appeal. For no better reason than the liking they inspired, he wished very sincerely they were not of the company.

With each fresh arrival Henry Julius had found occasion to whisper:

“Wrong types, old man. No good to us.”

And in every instance Vernon Winslowe had returned a disagreement.

But they were the wrong types—from Vernon's point of view—utterly wrong. Their transparent honesty baffled the motive of the entire business. Julius and the girl Lydia La Rue he had no particular compunction about—but the others. It was too late now to turn back. He was in the fight—in the very thick of it. Retreat was out of the question.

William Carpenter was grubbing his white waistcoat with a nervous hand and saying:

“Pleased to meet you.”

He said it to everyone in the room, for Vernon had passed him on with a word of introduction and turned to offer a greeting to his other guest.

Tommy Gates was a wisp of a man with deep cavernous eye-sockets and wheezy breath. Despite his years—he was only twenty-seven—he looked preternaturally old, with that quality of age acquired of ill health. He was an attractive enough fellow to look at, well-bred and well dressed; but

there was something oddly tragic in his eyes. Vernon had seen that expression often enough during the war on the faces of men who just before an engagement were given a presentiment of their own end. Tommy Gates looked like a man who had been recently introduced to the fact that he was going to die. The shadow of death seemed to bear him company. Even his light, gay laugh and the smile that rippled at the corners of his mouth could not disguise the fact. He was looking eagerly round the company when Vernon addressed him. His tragic eyes were sparkling with excitement.

“I beg your pardon,” said Vernon. “I didn’t see you.”

“That’s all right. Don’t apologize. I say, this is pretty terrific, ain’t it? My stars!”

“Care to be introduced?”

“No, no. Just let me watch. I’m eating it up, you know—just devouring it. By gad, you’re a benefactor, Winslowe. But I’ll sit down, if you don’t mind. That speck of fog played havoc with my breathing.”

“Breathing?”

“Asthma. Ha, ha! No game, I tell you.”

He sat rather jerkily just beside the door and lit a herbal cigarette.

“They smell rather foul,” he apologized. “D’you mind?”

“No, no, go ahead. But oughtn’t you to have stopped at home such a rotten night?”

“And missed *this*?” The tone was eloquent.

“I see,” said Vernon.

He drifted away, and was captured by Henry Julius.

“Going to include invalids?” was the query.

“Yes, by heaven—if they want to come,” he replied.

Henry Julius shrugged his shoulders and said:

“Your idea of business and mine differ.”

And suddenly Vernon answered like a man inspired.

“Business! This is a treasure hunt, and who shall say where or how or in what form we shall find it?”

There was only one more guest, and she was late. She bustled in unbuttoning a blue alpaca nurse’s cloak. On her

head was a small straw hat with streamers. Nurse Olive Banbury was a rough, efficient, practical woman who made no attempt to make more of her appearance than was dictated by the formal demands of cleanliness and tidiness. She was a typical example of a hospital nurse, which is to say that she was a trifle coarse in her use of words, was very outspoken, and much more likely to shock people than be shocked. Fostered by generations of untruthful fiction-writers, there is a popular belief that nurses as a class are cool-fingered, tender and cooing as the dove. Never was a greater fallacy, as anyone of even less than average intelligence must admit. Daily contact with all the unloveliness of disease and sickness can have but one natural outcome—a callous efficiency arising out of disgust, a hardening of the mental tissues. It would be absurd to assume otherwise. You shall find prodigies of kindness and of sense in the nursing sister, but, if you will avoid disappointment, seek not for a soft hand and a soft voice, for modesty or for demureness of mien. The soft hands have been hardened by carbolic soap and the soft voice roughened by the long, little hours of many unslept nights. Nor shall we regret that this is so—rather let us rejoice and be grateful. Our nursing sister has been a diver in deep seas for the rescue of the drowning; shall we speak evil of her for the barnacles that chap her sides?

“I nearly didn’t come,” she said, and sniffed, for the night had chilled her nose. “Had an appendix at the last moment.”

“An appendix. Good lord!” exclaimed Vernon. “Ought you——”

“Operation ward.”

“Oh, yes, yes.”

“And the lies I had to tell to get away.”

Averil came forward to take her cloak.

“Better put it by itself. It stinks of iodoform. Here, take this too.”

She dragged off her half-pie hat and threw it over Averil’s arm by the streamers.

“Am I the last?”

Vernon nodded.

Nurse Banbury banged her hair into some sort of shape with the palms of her hands.

“Then let’s get on with it,” she said.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was a buzz of general conversation in the room when Vernon crossed to the mantelpiece and touched the bell as a signal that supper might be served. During the moment of waiting he had leisure to survey his guests without interference. The experience was illuminating.

Henry Julius, with a sure, acquisitive sense, had fastened upon Joshua Morgan as the only person likely to do him any good. He had furnished the elderly Midlander with a cocktail—a drink which Joshua eyed with a suspicion equal to the one he felt for its provider—and was enveloping him with anecdotes of his personal prowess in realms of high finance. Henry Julius spoke in tens of thousands, passing airily from one huge sum to another. To uninitiated ears he must have sounded very rich indeed, but Joshua Morgan had not lived in Bradford City for nothing, and it did not take him long to reduce Henry's fifteen-story marble palaces to a single roll-top desk in a ten-by-twelve office in Gray's Inn Road.

"Ee," said he, at the close of a long recital, "sounds very grand and all, but you can't cut Bradford ice with a paste diamond, Mr. Julius."

But he was not allowed to score so easily. Henry Julius threw up his hands in a gesture of horror and dismay.

"Bradford! Of all terrible places. The colour of it—so drab. Don't tell me you live *there*."

You cannot hit a Midlander in his home town without accepting the consequences.

"Mister Julius," said Joshua, and his hand went to his cuff.

It was Kate Morgan who averted the conflict. Her im-

agination was focused on something higher than an urban wrangle.

"There!" she exclaimed. "If one of m' stay-laces hasn't bust! A rare crack it went with."

"Mother!" came the reproof.

"Well, never mind," said she. "It's a lot easier broken. Have you been much in foreign parts, Mr. Julius?"

The immediate danger having passed, Vernon turned his attention to Lydia La Rue. She was smoking a Russian cigarette through a jade holder, and was scattering the ash on the carpet until Mary Ottery came forward and offered her a tray.

"What's that for?" she asked.

"I thought you might want it."

"Why should I?"

"I just thought you might. Miss Hornby smoked a cigarette very occasionally, and I used to follow her about with an ash tray."

"Who's Miss Hornby?"

"The lady I was companion to."

From her great height Lydia looked down with a shade of pity.

"So you've been a companion?" she said.

"Yes, for twelve years." Mary hesitated; then: "What have you been?"

It was Lydia's turn to hesitate. She bit her lower lip, leaving the ruby filet on one of her teeth.

"I? Oh, a companion," she answered huskily.

"Then," said Mary, "we shall have lots to talk about, you and I."

"Yes," said Lydia, with an odd twist of the features, "yes, shan't we?"

She turned away sharply and found William Carpenter gazing at her open-mouthed.

He was a very simple fellow. Lydia pulled the cigarette from her holder and thrust it between his amazed lips.

"Er, thanks," he gasped, "but I don't smoke."

A very simple fellow indeed.

“Ha!” said Lydia, and marched off to get herself a drink, passing as she went under a barrage of contempt from the eyes of Nurse Banbury.

A champagne cork banged noisily.

“*Souper est servi, m’sieur,*” said the *maître d’hôtel*.

Zero hour.

Vernon Winslowe pulled himself together with a jerk. The battle of lies was to begin. Although his heart beat sledge-hammer blows against his ribs, outwardly he preserved an almost unnatural calm. He knew now that he hated the task that lay before him, knew that he would repent it to the last day of his life. Equally he knew that to retire at this stage would be cowardice pure and simple, for, try how he might, he could not convince himself whether the will to retire was inspired by desire to salve his conscience or save his skin. Granted a clear understanding on that point, he might have acted differently, but failing that understanding there was no choice but to go on. The initial step at least would have to be taken, even if afterwards he might discover intelligence and morality enough to extricate himself from perpetrating the full swindle. Any other course would reveal him to the company as a fraud. For the first time he realized the tremendous grip a dishonest action fastens upon a man. The thought flashed into his brain to foist the whole business off as a joke, but he knew from the very intensity of his audience that such a statement would never be believed. But fool, fool, not to have chosen his victims according to their deserts. What quarrel had he with these, with any one of them? What right had he——?

But too late, too late; the curtain was up—the battle of lies was to begin.

“Serve the soup,” he said, “and after that we’ll look after ourselves.” It surprised him to find his voice was so steady. “Mr. Julius, take the head of the table. I’m sure you’d be comfortable there.”

“Mr. Vice, eh?”

“Yes, rather.”

Lydia La Rue was patting a chair in an effort to secure him as a partner. Vernon shook his head.

“Thanks very much, I’m going to walk about, if nobody minds.”

Mary Ottery fluttered into the vacant seat. Joshua Morgan, a napkin tucked into his waistcoat, had already emplaced himself next to Julius.

“I’m about fit for supper,” he said. “These railway feeds lack nourishment somehow. Mother, get thee down.”

William Carpenter appeared to be holding out chairs for everyone. His politeness was oppressive and rather confused the personality of a guest with that of a waiter. Tommy Gates and Olive Banbury had already paired off side by side, drawn perhaps by the common ties of sickness and remedy.

“Gosh!” said Tommy, “but ain’t this marvellous?”

“I’m waiting,” came the practical rejoinder. Then, with a sniff and a nod at Lydia: “Who’s the——?”

“Part of the adventure.”

Olive Banbury sniffed again.

“Part of a good many adventures, I should say.”

“What’s it matter?” His hands were opening and shutting with nervous excitement. He pushed away his cup of soup and clasped them on the table. The light in his eyes was feverish.

“I know where you should be, my friend,” said Olive Banbury, “——in bed.”

He laughed at that.

The air was electric when Vernon began to talk. He was a fluent talker, with a quick switch from point to point and an odd habit of parenthesis.

“Look here, good people, this isn’t, properly speaking, a sit-down supper, but—don’t bother to pour out the wine. Put the bottles on this table. I’ll ring if I want anything, and no one else is to be admitted—understand? Good—yes—good-bye—but I’d a notion it ’ud be easier to frame this scheme over a bit of food.”

Then he told them of the number of replies to his advertisement.

“Over a thousand, and I can’t pretend I read ’em. The whole enterprise is built on chance, so I made my selection in a chancy way—shoved the letters in a basket and drew eight. The rest went up the chimney in smoke. I’m telling you this to demonstrate that I had no motive in choosing any one of you. That you’re here at all is a matter of luck—bad luck, perhaps.”

There was a buzz of astonishment, and when it had died away, Vernon went on talking.

“That may give you some idea of the shiftless, happy-go-lucky fellow and concern you’re dealing with. With some of you I dare say it’ll be enough in itself to persuade you to take to your heels. Well, if you feel like that, believe me, I’d be the last to blame you. If I were in your shoes I should be asking myself by now whether the whole thing isn’t an elaborate hoax. This talking is dry work. I’ll have a glass of wine—— Thanks very much.” He drank the wine at a gulp. “The fact of my asking each of you to bring along a deposit of twenty-five pounds must have looked a bit fishy.”

“Well, old man——” Henry Julius began.

But Vernon cut him short.

“Exactly! Of course it does. The entire proposition bears the stamp of fraud, and I’ll lay any odds no one would be surprised if that door were flung open and a police officer walked into the room.”

He accompanied the words with a gesture toward the door, a gesture so commanding that all eyes followed its direction. And, as if in response to what he had said, the door swung back on its hinges, and a quaint, smiling little man, peering at the company over the rims of a pair of thick pebble glasses, stepped softly into the room.

CHAPTER X.

THIS unexpected apparition, following so closely upon their host's prophetic utterance, drew a gasp from everyone present. The only person entirely at ease was the little old man himself. Framed in the dark oblong of the doorway, he stood smiling and bowing over a waist-high hand—the forefinger and thumb of which worked one against the other with a queer rotary movement.

He presented an odd spectacle with his rickety match-stick legs—his high-domed forehead and small nut-cracker face, creased for the moment in lines of the utmost geniality. The amber light flashing on the lenses of his eyeglasses imparted something uncanny and elfish to his appearance.

“Good evening, everyone,” said he with a bird-like quality of voice. “I hope I am not late, but I delayed my arrival until the waiters had retired.”

Vernon was first to recover from his surprise. He began: “Excuse me, sir,” when the little man held up a hand.

“The person who says ‘excuse me’ to the unlooked-for guest is surely host. Mr. Winslowe, delighted. We have met before, although in the natural excitement of the moment you would be unlikely to recall the fact.”

“But——”

“I half expected to find the door locked.”

Henry Julius remarked:

“A pity it wasn't.”

The little man favoured him with a smile all to himself.

“It would have made no difference. There is a balcony to this wing of the hotel. I should have come in by the window.”

“Are you aware,” said Vernon, “that this is a private party?”

“Then let us secure ourselves against further intrusions.”

And with great dexterity he turned the key in the lock and dropped it in his pocket.

“My stars,” gasped Tommy, “ain’t he splendid?”

But this development did not suit Vernon Winslowe. He felt that the presence of this little, smiling man constituted a new danger.

“Who are you?” he demanded.

“Isinglass,” came the reply. “Isinglass—Isinglass.”

The name was repeated incredulously by Joshua Morgan.

“It’s stuff they put in jellies to make them set,” observed his wife.

“Precisely, madam,” said the remarkable owner of this remarkable name. “A substance which transforms a fluid into a solid.” And as he spoke his eyes flicked round and reposed for the briefest second on Vernon’s face.

“May I ask what you want?” said Vernon.

“Primarily to be of this company. You received my letter?”

“I received over a thousand letters.”

“Just so! Your failure to reply in no way discouraged me. I was determined to come and here I am.”

“But I told the hall porter to admit no one else.”

“I foresaw that possibility and escaped its consequences by engaging the adjoining suite.”

Henry Julius threw the pressure of his personality in the pool.

“Turf him out, Mr. Winslowe—go on—out him.”

The eyes of Mr. Isinglass sparkled with a dangerous light.

“The key of that door is in my pocket, sir,” he said. “I am an old man, but I warn you I shall defend my intrusion if necessary with my life.”

“Dash it,” said Tommy, “he’s a sport. Let him stop, I say.”

Clearly they had reached an *impasse* and there were many cogent reasons for avoiding violence.

Vernon lifted his shoulders hopelessly.

“You mean you refuse to go?”

“Just that. I am as firmly rooted here as that awkward possession, a man’s conscience.”

“Well, I don’t know that one extra matters a great deal.”

Mr. Isinglass protested.

“Of course it matters. To me the business of to-night is of supreme importance.”

“And to me,” said Mary Ottery, leading a chorus of assent.

“Then if no one minds.”

So far from minding, most of the guests expressed the fervent opinion that Mr. Isinglass would be an ornament to the company.

“Hark at ’em, Winslowe,” he cried. “The yellow fire of Spanish gold burns in their eyes—the South Sea surf is roaring in their ears. Up with the anchor and let’s away.” And, having delivered himself of this inspiring address, he squatted on a stool before the fire with his chin resting on his knees, looking for all the world like an aged pixy.

So, having no choice but to proceed, Vernon Winslowe plunged headlong into the telling of the tale, and a very good job he made of it.

Perhaps the presence of Mr. Isinglass stirred his imagination and lent colour to his speech. In his heart he knew that the old man would disbelieve all he said, wherefore he confined himself as nearly as possible to a recital of the facts. He told how years before he and another boy had found the map under its coverlet of perished and mildewed papers—he told how to their boyish understanding its significance had never been made plain. “That came afterwards—only a few weeks ago. I was rummaging among some old junk and refound this thing and suddenly——” His audience were leaning forward in tense attitudes as he outlined the various reasons that led him to deduce that the map was of a treasure island.

“I tell you I didn’t sleep much that night.”

Terribly ashamed he was of making statements of this kind; the effect they produced on his hearers was almost tangible. He hurried back to the truth to recover confidence—dashed

in a word portrait of Roger Winslowe with a few deft phrases.

“A crazy adventurer at heart—nerves like steel—pluck enough for a regiment. And a good chap—loved by everyone. It was his friends—the men he trusted who pulled him down—turned a saint into a sinner.”

He could be fluent enough on that subject. The mere sound of his own voice fanned the embers of his indignation to a flame. Old Mr. Isinglass cocked an eyebrow and listened attentively.

“Drained him and beggared him and left him broke. By God, not only in those days that kind of thing happened. Friends, eh? Keep your eye on your friends is a motto worth following.”

For some reason Henry Julius said: “Hear, hear.”

Vernon became suddenly aware that he was giving himself away and switched back to the commonplace.

“There’s a life of Roger Winslowe at the British Museum if anyone cares to look it up. Five years’ piracy in China Seas—getting rich and getting his own back. They say he cleaned up over a million and the bulk of it was buried.”

“Phew!” said Henry Julius.

And Mary Ottery clasped her hands and murmured:

“What a lovely ancestor to have had!”

Tommy Gates was beyond coherent speech and William Carpenter seemed to have grown in inches. Lydia La Rue was pressing the back of her hand so tightly to her mouth as to leave printed thereon a scarlet stencil of her lips. Only Joshua Morgan was completely master of himself. He came from Bradford City.

“I’d be glad to see the title deeds of that Cornish house,” said he, “and look at the map myself.”

“Must everything be spoiled while people rustle papers?” Mary protested.

“No, he’s right,” said Vernon. “And, oddly enough, I have them with me.” He was glad of a moment’s respite. From his dispatch-case he took a bundle of legal papers and the iron cylinder containing the map.

Julius and Morgan examined the title deeds and declared them to be satisfactory.

“And now for the map.”

But Vernon shook his head. He had withdrawn it from the cylinder and was holding it up for inspection, but too far away for its detail and lettering to be visible.

“Sorry,” he said, “but until we’re bound together in some sort of partnership I feel I ought not to show this to anyone.”

There was disappointment in the faces of the women, but the men applauded his caution.

“That’s sense.” “That’s business.”

“It’s the map of an island in the South Seas,” Vernon went on, “and it’s written on calico or something. I’ve no objection to one of you reading the few words in the corner. Perhaps you, Carpenter?”

William Carpenter came forward anxiously, with that air of nervous determination sometimes seen in the member of an audience roped in, against his better judgment, to assist a stage illusionist in the performance of an “experiment.”

“Here,” said Vernon, folding the map so that only a bottom corner was visible. “It’s fairly legible, although the lettering may puzzle you.”

You could have heard a leaf fall in the silence that precluded the reading of the words.

“Chrm—hum,” went William Carpenter, then: “Cross marks Cache. Needle rock meridian—point of shadow—fifteen paces due west, three north and under, then the initials R. W.”

There was a kind of sigh when he finished—a sigh and a hiss of intaken breath. In the eyes of Mary Ottery and Kate Morgan little beacons were burning. A flush of excitement had spread over the whitened features of Lydia La Rue as though in an instant a sudden health had found her. Tommy Gates was leaning forward, his chest against the table edge. The beating of his heart shook him visibly.

With mouth open and knife and fork in either hand sat Joshua Morgan. Henry Julius was stroking his silky moustache with an oddly sensitive and nervous third finger, while Nurse Banbury was rapping her foot very fast against the floor, like someone who has been waiting over-long for a journey to start.

No one, save Mr. Isinglass, was aware of the presence of Averil Chester. She had crept in from the adjoining room while Vernon was talking. Lost in the shadows of a recess by the fire-place, she watched and listened. A new idea seemed to have come to her—something at once desperate and determined—a very new idea it must have been, since its arrival had surprised away all other expressions from her face. From where he sat, perched on the stool, Mr. Isinglass could hear her quick breathing and note how her hands were pressed against her breast.

The silence was broken by Joshua Morgan.

“By gum,” he said, “I wonder what’s there.”

And Tommy Gates, throwing his weight back in the chair, swept a tumbler from the table, which fell with a crash.

“Never mind,” said Olive Banbury. “It’s lucky.”

There was a note of hysteria in Lydia La Rue’s sudden laugh.

No one was thinking about Mr. Isinglass, and a question from him, precise as a railway time-table, irritated everybody.

“Might I be allowed to feel the corner of this map? Calico, I think you said.”

“Certainly, if you wish,” said Vernon.

The old man dropped a bread pill he was rolling into his jacket pocket and fingered the map for a moment, with closed eyes.

“Thank you,” he said at last. “Interesting and most surprising.” He seemed genuinely puzzled.

Vernon took a risk.

“Have you any opinion about it?” he asked.

“Certainly I have. In my opinion it is a piece of very old linen—very, very old.”

Henry Julius came forward hurriedly.

“You’re not suggesting, sir, there is anything wrong with it?”

“On the contrary, it is surprisingly right.”

Henry wiped his forehead.

“Then why start a scare?”

Mr. Isinglass raised his hands apologetically.

“I beg everyone’s pardon,” he said.

A crisis had been averted. Vernon began to speak again very fast.

“Well, there you are, good people,” he said. “That’s the whole thing and it’s for you to decide whether or no there’s enough evidence—after you with that match, Julius—to justify carrying on. For my own part, I’m not going to advance any opinion. For what it’s worth I’ve told the story and the rest is up to you. So take it or leave it. I——” He left the sentence in mid-air and paused to light his cigarette, then walked over and rested his elbows on the mantelpiece. “If you want to ask questions, fire away.”

A great wave of fatigue and self-disgust was sweeping over him. To conceal it he kept his head averted. All he wanted now was to be alone—quite alone with his thoughts—to conclude the evening’s entertainment as quickly as possible and escape. If only they had doubted or distrusted him it might have been different. It was their enthusiasm, their acceptance, their transparent belief which was so hard to bear.

Fragments of talk drifted half heard to his ears, for they were discussing it eagerly among themselves.

“I was thinking of Annie and her first,” murmured Mrs. Morgan, in a rustling whisper. “That—and not getting letters. That place the South Seas is a rare distance away.”

Then came a question from Tommy:

“What’s the climate like?”

“Marvellous.”

“And would we see any parrot-fish?” asked Mary.

This was a woman he had planned to swindle and she desired to see parrot-fish. Vernon answered mechanically:

“By looking over the ship’s side.”

“Miss Hornby had a parrot,” said Mary. “Once it said ‘Blast!’ so we gave it to the dustman.”

Someone laughed.

“And when should we start?” from Tommy.

“As soon as we could get a yacht and fit her out.”

“A month?”

“Less perhaps.”

Then Henry Julius, clear, incisive and to the point. It was the question of all others Vernon most dreaded.

“What’s it going to cost?”

He forced himself to reply.

“To do it comfortably—roughly a thousand a head.”

The silence that followed was poignant.

Lydia’s shoulders went up. “Think we’re millionaires,” she snapped.

William Carpenter sagged. Mary Ottery seemed to go small in her chair. Nurse Banbury rose sharply and brushed some crumbs out of her lap.

“That being so,” she said, “I may as well get back. Good night, everyone.”

Vernon turned to face the situation. He knew that four of the company were out of it. The ante was too high. Here was his chance of escape—a simple, certain chance—and, insanely, he could not take it. In the presence of the disappointment, amounting to anguish, that was written on those four white faces he could not accept the chance.

“Of course, if we hired an ocean tramp or something,” he stammered, “the thing could be done for less—much less—half in fact.”

He saw the colour of hope running back through empty veins.

“Five hundred?”

“Say five hundred.”

“I don’t quite know what an ocean tramp is,” said Mary Ottery, “and most of my life I’ve been a little frightened of tramps, but unless everyone here is very rich——” she looked pathetically at Joshua.

“Well,” said he, “I don’t want to upset arrangements, but at my time of life a man likes to be comfortable and——”

Lydia La Rue banged a hand on the table that set the glasses ringing. Mary touched as many as she could reach into silence to save the lives of sailors.

“Oh, God,” cried Lydia, “if we’re going, what’s the matter how we go?”

It was Henry Julius who put a motion before the company in favour of the cheaper rate. It was sheer madness to spend five hundred when it could reasonably be saved. Time enough for extravagance when the treasure was found. The motion was carried by a large majority.

“I wonder,” said Mr. Isinglass modestly, “if I might make a suggestion. I cannot help feeling the ladies will find a long voyage in a tarry old tramp far from agreeable.”

“If we do we’ll tell you,” said Lydia shortly.

Mr. Isinglass proceeded in an even tone.

“Rats, cockroaches, and those little red ants everywhere, and all for the sake of a treasure which even our host admits may never be found.”

“Some of us,” commented Henry Julius, “haven’t been invited to look for it.”

“Just so. My reason for proposing the use of my own yacht the *Mascot* was a feeling that in some measure I must justify my intrusion.”

Vernon started. Here was a new development which must be stopped at all costs. Fortunately Henry Julius seemed the man to obstruct it. For the very briefest space he laid a forefinger on his nose and tilted his head on one side.

“My dear sir,” he said, “the mystery of your presence is now revealed. I’m a business man myself. Accept my sincere compliments.”

But if his intention was to embarrass, it was a dismal failure.

“Ah, Mr. Julius,” said the old man, “like many others you fall into the common error of judging the world by your first impression. Believe me, there is no surer form of injustice. It is not to the angry, the greedy, the revengeful

surface of a man we should direct our gaze. I have come to learn that face value is the faultiest of all valuations. A ripple on the surface of a pond will not tell you how deep or how shallow are the waters beneath—nor shall you say when you see a policeman lead a victim down the street with a hand upon his collar which of those two is the sinner.” There was something strangely fervent in his tone—a note of inspiration. His sudden drop into the commonplace was surprising. “By which, if somewhat obliquely, I am trying to convince you that I am not touting for a firm of shippers nor very markedly for my own advantage. The *Mascot* is a yacht admirably suited to our needs, and you can have her at the price of the lowest offer you receive for the charter of an ocean tramp. I do not say you can have her for nothing, because to do so would be an impertinence and would make people believe she would probably sink in the first gale.”

“Do you mean this?”

“I have an eccentric habit of meaning what I say.”

“And you wouldn’t be asking for a larger share of the profit?”

“Would you believe me?—no.”

Management of affairs was passing out of the hands of Vernon Winslowe, and he was powerless to resist. The words of protest he tried to utter fell on deaf ears.

“Well, why not?” boomed Joshua Morgan. “If Mr. Isinglass isn’t having a bit of fun at our expense, I say let’s close here and now. See here, people! I’m no hand at speechifying, and seems we could go on cracking about pros and cons of this here cruise till all’s blue. But what’s good of that? Either we go or we don’t go, and I’m for going. Like enough it’s craziest thing any crowd ever contemplated, and folks hearing of our act’ll say we’re daft and gormless, the whole jing lot of us. For what may or may not happen we’ve nobbut ourselves to thank and ourselves to blame. Fools we may be and likely are, but there’s some kind of grandeur in this ’ere folly that’s got my sense by the weazen and whacked it. Young Mr. Winslowe has put his case fair

and honest, laying no odds on success or failure. Whatever you others may decide, I'm with him, and in token of fact here's two notes of twenty-five pounds apiece to cover deposit for t'missus and self and I don't ask no receipt."

Something approaching a tumult followed this unexpected allegiance from the "solidest" man in the room—a tumult confused with the rustle of banknotes. Simultaneously everyone was dragging money from pocket-books and bags and holding it out to Vernon.

"Here you are." "Take it." "Here's mine." "I'm with you." "My bit, Winslowe."

But before a single note had changed hands, Mr. Isinglass was on his feet.

"Just one moment, please," he begged, "one moment before these deposits are paid." He turned and laid a hand on Vernon's shoulder. "You, Winslowe, have given us your reasons why we should join you in this treasure hunt. Would it not be to the advantage of the occasion if we, on our side, showed an equal frankness and gave our reasons for wishing to come? There lie before us a great many weeks and months of each other's society. It would make a basis for friendship and understanding if our secrets and ambitions, our little or mighty motives were made a common property."

CHAPTER XI.

IT was Henry Julius who broke the silence which followed Mr. Isinglass's suggestion. He spoke crisply with the characteristic courage of his race.

"Money," he said. "Money—and I'll wager that answer covers the rest of the party, too."

But he was wrong, as the next speaker, Joshua Morgan, revealed. Joshua Morgan had stolen a quick glance at his wife, then dropped his eyes to the level of the table. While he talked he fiddled with a fork, digging a little honeycomb of holes in the white cloth.

"It's this way wi' t'missus and self. From one year's end to 'nother it's been nōbbut business, business, business. In a manner of speaking, we've never had our noses off grindstone and never hardly had time to get to know the quiet, peaceful sides of each other's natures."

"We've reared a family o' eight," Mrs. Morgan interpolated, "and that spells a rare lot of work."

"We haven't took a holiday until to-day and never had cash or leisure for a proper honeymoon. It's been at back o' my head for past thirty years, when business was firm enough to carry on unaided and when youngsters was able to blow their own noses, to slip away like and have a shot at getting a bit more familiar wi' each other. Busy folks us have been, busy folks—and that's about all——"

His voice trailed off to nothing and his eyes, in which there was a shade of embarrassment, sought the face of Mr. Isinglass, as though from him alone could understanding be expected.

"I see," said the old man, with the tenderest inflexion. "I think we all see, Mr. Morgan. You don't want

to finish up, like so many married couples, mere business acquaintances.”

“That’s it.”

What William Carpenter had to say was inevitable. It was the rebellion of a splendid physical specimen against the barred restraints of city life.

“Sorting mail and selling postage stamps isn’t much of a job for a man who—well, I don’t know—ha—hm!—but I’m a fairly strong sort of chap.” A sudden courage seemed to drive away his huskiness. “Sometimes I’ve felt if I looked at the world through bars a day longer—those cursed grilles—I’d tear them down with my hands.” His mighty hands went out to suit an action to the words. It was the first time they had revealed any relation to the rest of his body. For the moment he looked magnificent—tremendous—as though one of the great statues of Gog or Magog had leapt from a plinth in the Guildhall armed for the destruction of every bank building and warehouse within sight. It was probably the excess of his own emotions that scared him back to the normal stature of his mind and body. His hands dropped to his sides and the nervous cough returned.

“Her—hm! I beg everyone’s pardon for talking about myself like this, only—hm!—only this chance seemed like heaven—to get away—break away—I’ve a house I can sell and some bits of furniture, and——”

The power of speech deserted him and he sat down heavily, snapping the chair back as his weight was thrown against it.

“You wouldn’t wonder why I wanted to go,” said Nurse Banbury, “if at 9 A.M. every day—every year—you were stuck in an operating-theatre with the smell of steam and iodoform and—and the general air of blood and beastliness. It’s seemed to me there isn’t a decent sight or a clean smell in all the world. Then I saw this advertisement and with it an opportunity to—oh, I don’t know, but surely God didn’t grow flowers for only the lucky ones to look at and catch the scent of!”

Mr. Isinglass nodded and turned to Mary Ottery.

“You, madam?” he said.

She answered fearlessly in her pale, quiet voice.

“Mine’s a selfish reason—very selfish. I’ve been a companion to an old lady for twelve years and nothing has ever happened to me. In the mornings I used to bring her breakfast on a tray and in the afternoons I read to her—louder and louder I read as she got deafer and deafer. She had an old dog who snored in a basket at the end of the bed, and he was blind and used to bite me when I brought his dinner. That was all that happened—twelve years of nothing but that. Once there was a fire at the house next door to where we lived, but I was at the cemetery leaving flowers on the grave of someone I never knew, and it was out before I came back. I heard the engines going away as I came round the corner of the street. Mr. Winslowe, I’ve my savings and the bit Miss Hornby left me. It’s all I’m ever likely to have, but I’ll give it to you freely if only you’ll let me come. I don’t mind whether there’s treasure on the island or not, but I do want something to happen to me before it’s too late.”

Lydia La Rue threw up her head and laughed. It was a hard laugh, poised on the edge of hysteria.

“You lucky, lucky woman!” she said. “Just because too much has happened to me, I want to get away. Too much! Too much!”

“I think I understand,” whispered Mary, and with a sudden impulse she slipped her hand into Lydia’s and left it there.

“And you, sir,” said Mr. Isinglass, with an eye on Tommy Gates.

“What’s that? Me? Last week I saw a man in Harley Street about this asthma.” He gasped a bit, lit a cigarette, and went on. “He gave me three months to live.” His voice pitched high and ringing. “To live, mark you. To *live*.”

A shiver ran through the company, and from Kate Morgan came a barely audible: “Poor, poor lad.”

No one suggested that Mr. Isinglass should offer his rea-

sons for joining the party, and in the absence of the demand he volunteered no explanation. His attention was riveted on Vernon Winslowe, who, white and drawn and nibbling at a finger-nail, stood silently in the centre of the room. Throughout the series of confidences, he had betrayed a growing sense of distress which reached its climax at the close of Tommy Gates's recital of his own death sentence. He started like a man waked from a nightmare when Mr. Isinglass addressed him.

"I think," said the old man, "you owe this company a debt of gratitude for their frankness. Nothing remains but to collect the deposits."

There was a mute appeal in Vernon's eyes when he turned to reply.

"But I say, look here—surely there is no need for money to change hands yet awhile. When I put in the advertisement I had no idea of the sort of people who'd be likely to turn up. You see, I thought, perhaps, there'd be some—but with you—from any one of you I'd ever so much rather the matter of deposits was waived. I'll let you know how things stand in a day or two. If you'll leave your addresses—I'll write and——"

It was Averil who collected the addresses, silently and without asking leave.

"You see, until this business of the yacht is fixed up there can be no question of expense. I—I'm frightfully sorry I ever insulted you with the suggestion." He became aware he was talking very badly—aimlessly—in a circle. His one hope was to escape at any cost the branding-iron of accepting money from these simple, trusting people, but the hope was not to be realized.

"Winslowe," said Mr. Isinglass, "here is a matter about which there can be no argument. You have given us your *bona fides* and in justice you cannot refuse to accept ours."

And, so saying, he thrust a banknote into Vernon's protesting hand.

"Here, take it," said Lydia. "What's all the fuss about, anyway?"

Tommy Gates and Mary Ottery followed suit. Henry Julius was busy with a fountain-pen and a cheque-book.

“Mr. Winslowe might change his mind,” said he. “By accepting a cheque, a form of contract is constituted between the parties.”

It may have been this note of caution that awoke something arbitrary in the bosom of Joshua Morgan. From a well-filled pocket-book he drew two notes of £100 and thrust them into Vernon’s hand.

“My lad,” he said, “here’s a couple of hundred by way of showing the faith we have in you. Aye, and if you want more, don’t hesitate to ask for it.”

“Yes, but look here——” cried Vernon desperately. But he was not allowed to finish.

“And now,” said Isinglass, “it is time we were on the move. Mr. Winslowe has had a trying ordeal; let us show our sensibility of the fact by giving him a chance to get to bed at a decent hour. To-morrow we might take a look at the *Mascot* at her moorings in the Solent. Shall we say Waterloo at 10.45? You will find me at the barrier ten minutes before the train is due to start. Don’t bother about tickets, Mr. Winslowe and I will arrange all that. Carpenter, give Mr. Morgan a hand with his coat. Miss La Rue, this wrap, I believe, is yours.”

So active and bustling was he during these last two minutes that no one had a chance to say a word. He was like an old collie dog barking at the tail of a flock of sheep. His organization of the exodus was a triumph of politeness and efficiency. He even succeeded in dislodging Henry Julius, who was putting a pertinent question as to the “Film rights of the cruise.” And when the last guest had been rounded up and sent forth, he stood for a second smiling in the doorway.

“Winslowe,” he said, “you and I will meet again very soon.”

Then the door snapped and Vernon was alone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE first few moments after the last of his guests had departed were an unspeakable relief to Vernon. The burden of continuous lying was removed and every fibre of his being relaxed. His mind, as it were, fell into a kind of restful oblivion from which it awoke slowly to a consciousness of the contemptible nature of his offence. He had offered false freedom to caged birds and very presently he would have to declare its falsity. The thought smote him like a whip lash and he covered his eyes and groaned aloud. In the darkness he was haunted by the fires of enthusiasm his words had lighted. He saw a circle of radiant faces transform slowly through despair into hatred and disgust. The banknotes, carelessly thrust into his pocket, burnt like live coals. He drew them forth and stared at them stupidly and an idea developed. Then a voice broke the stillness.

It was Averil Chester who spoke.

“May I speak to you?”

He pulled himself together with a jerk.

“What? No. I thought everyone had gone. No, not now. Have you that list of addresses?”

She picked it up from where it lay on the writing-table.

“It’s here.”

He took it from her mechanically.

“I want nine envelopes,” said he. “Stamped envelopes.”

“I’ll fetch them.”

“Yes, do.”

At the door she asked:

“May I speak to you afterwards?”

“Yes, if you wish,” he replied.

She went out.

He stood for a moment biting a finger-nail, then crossed quickly to his dispatch-case, took from it a small Colt automatic and jerked a cartridge into the breech. At the sound of returning footsteps he put the pistol on the writing-table and covered it with a handkerchief. Then he sat down and dipped a pen.

Averil came in and gave him the envelopes. Without a word he began to address them from the list she had made. The pile of banknotes was heaped on the table beside him. Averil watched him as he wrote. From the expression on her face there seemed to be a struggle going on within her. Presently she spoke in a hard, clear voice.

"Mr. Winslowe—or should I call you Lieutenant-Commander?"

"I'm busy," he said.

"Will you please endorse these details? Joined Navy 1906. Served during the war in submarines. Decorations, D.S.O., D.S.C., and bar. Inherited seventy-five thousand pounds at the death of Hunter Winslowe." She read the questions from a note-book.

Vernon turned in his chair.

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm a reporter on the *Courier*."

He did not reply for a moment. Then: "I see. Well, you've collected a story to-night."

She nodded.

"This cap and apron business was bluff?"

Again she nodded.

Vernon looked at her in silence. That was easy, for hers was a face that was pleasing to look at.

"I thought I couldn't have been mistaken," he said. "Yet at first you took me in." Then he added bitterly: "A great many people have taken me in. It was that common accent you put on. That pleases you, eh?" (For she had smiled.)

"It's nice to bring things off," said she.

"Not always," he replied. "But you are the girl, aren't you?"

“The girl?”

“Who hunted with the *Quorn*—a matter of three years ago?”

Again she nodded.

“Wait a bit and I’ll tell you your name—Averil Chester.” He hesitated. “You were engaged to someone.”

“How did you know that?”

“I asked. I wanted an introduction to you—then, when I heard, I—I dropped the notion. A man called Sullivan.”

“You know him?” She had flushed a deep crimson. He marked the flush with a kind of satisfaction.

“Yes, I know him.”

And under her breath Averil said:

“The beast.”

“What’s that?”

“Nothing.”

“You *were* engaged to each other?”

“We were.”

“And now?”

“My father lost all his money, you see.”

“Oh,” said Vernon Winslowe, “like that, was it? Sullivan’s gone abroad, they tell me.”

“Yes—to the South Seas.”

“South Seas?” he repeated quickly.

“So I heard.”

“When was your engagement bro——”

“It wasn’t, properly speaking, broken off,” she replied. “Technically, I suppose, it still exists.”

“Technically,” he repeated, and turned to address another envelope. Did she know, he wondered, about the other woman? Sullivan had gone south and he had not gone alone. A yearning to meet Sullivan again swept over Vernon Winslowe like a sudden storm. Had he known it, a similar yearning shook Averil. All paths led south that night. Then came the thought that he was wasting precious moments talking to this girl. Moments equally precious because they were spent that way.

"It's getting late," he said. "If you've to get your story in for to-morrow morning's issue——"

"Suppose," she answered quickly, "I was willing to exchange my story for an adventure?"

"What?"

"Mr. Winslowe, I've made up my mind to go."

"Then good night," said he.

"To go on this cruise."

He laughed at that. A queer laugh with something of a sob in it.

"I wouldn't bother," said he. "Really, I wouldn't."

"I'm sincere," she replied, "dead sincere."

"Run away home," he said. "Would you burn your fingers, too?"

She was quiet for a moment. Then:

"Either you consent to my coming or I shall write my story in such a way that to-night's doings will look like a fraud."

He answered wearily:

"You'd be a genius if you made them look like anything else."

"I mean it. It's in my power to wreck the whole business."

He turned and looked at her severely, but the severity melted into a smile.

"What are you thinking?"

"Only how very happy such a cruise might be if——"

He left the sentence unfinished.

"I want my answer, please. If you consent to my coming I shall write nothing. I give you five minutes to make up your mind."

"But why should you want to come?"

"Perhaps because I'm angry," she said. "Perhaps because I feel I must——must."

"Being angry isn't any good—it's a boomerang," said he.

"Let me come," she pleaded, all suddenly a woman. "Do let me."

He thought for a moment, and, queerly enough, his thoughts were remote from what they spoke about. He thought how different life might have been if they had met a little sooner. There had been no woman in his life to guide and be guided by. And now his life was over and the page was to end in a blot instead of a full stop. He would have to say something if only to secure solitude for making the finish.

"Then if you insist," said he, "you shall have a place in the same boat with the rest of them."

"You mean that?"

"I mean it. But don't be in a hurry to throw up your job at Fleet Street. It takes time, you know, to launch a vessel for the Islands of the Blest."

"I'll leave my deposit at your rooms in the morning," said she.

He pondered for a moment, biting the end of his pen.

"No, bring it round here. There may be a newspaper story waiting for you."

"What kind of a story?"

"Quite short. Good night."

"Good night," said she. "I trust you."

He nodded gloomily.

"I seem to inspire trust, do I not?"

"I shan't come too early. You look as if you want a good rest."

"Yes," he replied, "I shall have that."

She had reached the door when he rose and came toward her.

"I say, shake hands, will you?"

"Of course, but why?"

"Oh, I don't know—I just felt I—I'd like someone to—to see me off."

"See you off?" she repeated.

"Did I say that? What a fool I am! Good night."

He held her hand a moment longer than is usual. After she had gone he felt that the room had become suddenly cold. He shivered as he folded the notes and began putting

them in envelopes—shivered and looked round for his coat. It lay across a chair-back, and he walked towards it, only to stop half-way with the reflection of how useless it would be to put it on. Very soon it would take more than an overcoat to keep him warm. The notion struck him how absurd it was to provide breakfasts for condemned men on the morning of execution. He was standing irresolute, a note and an envelope in his hand, when the door opened and Mr. Isinglass came into the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. ISINGLASS was wearing a gorgeous silk dressing-gown, and he carried a japanned tin deed-box. The smile still played over his wrinkled features. His quick, restless eyes took a rapid inventory of Vernon's face and of the writing-table beyond.

"I hope you are not getting tired of me," he said disarmingly, "but I could not rest without expressing my admiration for you."

Vernon moved his head from side to side.

"May we take all that as said?" he implored.

"No," said the old man, "for at present it has not been said. You, Winslowe, by accident or design, have brought a little gossamer into a world of hobnailed boots. It was as though you had opened the doors of the true romance to a lot of weary people. Did you notice that young man with the inky fingers? Looking, it seemed to me, I saw his hand resting on the tiller of an argosy. The same with the others—everywhere a limitless horizon. That's no small achievement for a youngster like yourself. You have launched a ship of dreams, and it is my mission to keep its sails filled with wind."

"Your mission?"

"Yes, I regard it almost as a call."

"I don't follow you."

"Then let me make my meaning clear. Winslowe, I am an old man, and for nearly fifty years I have lain on my back like a log, unable to move either hand or foot. As a boy of fourteen I fell from a ladder in an orchard and injured my spine. It starts like an advertisement for a patent medicine, does it not? Do you see my hands? They are like a child's, unscarred by the labour of this world.

Only my brain has been free of the high roads and from where I lay has excursed into odd corners of life and of other men's minds. A man must have occupation, or he is better dead—and I chose for occupation a form of philosophy that had as its object an effort to acquire toleration and understanding of human frailties. For what small success I may have achieved I do not thank myself, but the Almighty for the help and companionship He has given me. You are surprised at that, Winslowe—it strikes you as an awkward remark to have made—for in this modern world of ours the name of the Almighty is rarely used in other than frivolous or violent relation. You are too young to use it simply and sincerely as you would speak of the name of a friend. I, on the other hand, have come to look on the Almighty as the one true friend whose doors are open day and night and at whose table there is a place laid against the arrival of the tardy visitor. You must remember I was a log for fifty years—an immovable mass, and it was not to be expected that from the ranks of living men and women I should find one idle enough, patient and generous enough, or with time enough to spare to offer fifty years of companionship to a useless log. Had such a thing been possible, I would not have accepted the sacrifice. But with the greatest Host of all we cannot outstay our welcome. So upon the mercy of the greatest Host I threw myself. It happens, therefore, through that companionship that I can see sometimes with clearer vision than is common to all—and understand a fathom or two below the angry surface of a man's mind. But understanding is of no great value without the power to use it for a wider benefit than mere accumulation of knowledge. There came to me, therefore, a great longing to rise up and move about among my fellow-men and women, being of what service I might in their needs and distresses. This longing I expressed in the form of a prayer very earnestly repeated to my Maker. In all reverence I made with Him a compact that should my strength return I would devote what years of life still remained to me to the service of happiness. It

must have been thought that the prayer was worthy of answer—for one morning—— Ah, Winslowe! You will laugh at this—you will say that to the surgeon who operated upon me is the credit due. I would not blame you; though for my part I remember very vividly, under the whirling daze of the anæsthetic, a figure that laid healing hands upon me and said in a voice that might not be disobeyed: ‘Arise and walk.’ ”

While he spoke he had taken a piece of bread from the supper table and was rolling pellet after pellet between his forefinger and thumb.

“Choose what reason you will for my recovery, I am now beyond question an extremely sprightly old man, who has spent the last few years hopping about from place to place in search of the adventure of happiness. Will you deny it was the hand of fate itself led me to the *Times* advertising office on the day you visited it? It was neither accident nor design brought me there, Winslowe; it was compulsion—a certain sense that I should find there what I sought—a way to happiness through the columns of agony.” He broke off abruptly and looked at Vernon with twinkling eyes.

“Dear me! I have been talking a disgraceful amount, and I am sure you want to be rid of me. Let us conclude our business and get to bed.”

“Mr. Isinglass,” said Vernon, with an effort, “I may as well say straight out there is no possible business that you and I could have in common.” And then he added brokenly: “I wish to God there were.”

“Then if you wish that,” said the old man, “there is.” He moved across to the writing-table and picked up one of the addressed envelopes. “There is a line of Shakespeare I would remind you of:

“‘What to ourselves in passion we propose,
The passion ending doth the purpose lose.’”

Vernon nodded.

“That’s true enough.”

“Possibly, but here is a purpose that is much too good to lose—as you yourself will be first to admit. Ah. These envelopes! I see you are already sending out the call for our next meeting.”

“As a matter of fact, I——”

“But isn’t it a mistake to leave money lying about?” He picked up the notes and squared them into a packet. “Will you allow me to be your banker? I have brought with me a little cash-box. Youth is notoriously careless.”

“Those notes——” Vernon began.

“Will be much safer under lock and key.” So saying, Mr. Isinglass dropped them in the box and fastened down the lid. “These envelopes won’t be wanted until we have something definite to communicate.” He tore them across and dropped the pieces into the fire.

“But don’t you understand?” cried Vernon desperately.

“I understand it is very risky for a young man on the verge of bankruptcy to handle public funds——”

“How did you know that?”

“I have had two days to find things out.” His wandering finger plucked at the handkerchief and revealed Vernon’s automatic pistol lying beneath. He picked it up gingerly.

“Yours?” he asked.

“Mine.”

“Ha!”

There was a silence while the two men looked at one another. It was broken by Mr. Isinglass.

“As you have so good-naturedly entrusted the notes to my care, you will be good enough to lend me this to protect them with.”

He did not wait for consent, but dropped the pistol in the pocket of his dressing-gown.

“Excellent. I think there is nothing more to be done at present, so I will bid you good night. We meet tomorrow for our trip to the Solent. Do not forget the train goes at ten forty-five, and I shall be waiting at the barrier.”

He had reached the door when Vernon’s voice recalled him.

“I want my pistol,” he said. “Will you please return it to me?”

But Mr. Isinglass shook his head.

“You are all wrong about that,” he said. “You don’t want it a bit. It’s the greatest mistake in the world to believe in moments of emergency fire-arms are a protection.”

“Have it your own way,” said Vernon, and his eyes travelled to the window, through which could be seen the lights of warehouses reflected in the sluggish water of the Thames. The old man followed the direction of his gaze and of his thoughts. Then he spoke crisply, incisively:

“There is one important point, Winslowe.”

“Well?”

“We are going on this treasure hunt, you know. We *are* going—we *are*. Good night.”

He disappeared. For a long while Vernon stood staring at the open doorway. Presently the *maitre d’hôtel* made a ceremonious entrance.

“Look here,” said Vernon, “I don’t know how much this supper cost, but——”

M. Bendigo made a gesture of surprise.

“The bill is already paid, monsieur.”

“Paid?”

“By M. Isinglass.”

“Oh,” said Vernon dully. “Oh, is it?”

“*Mais oui!* Monsieur’s bedroom is ready, if he wishes to retire.”

“My bedroom—who said I wanted a room?”

“M. Isinglass. As monsieur has no luggage, M. Isinglass has arranged for a pair of his own pyjamas——”

A desire to laugh suddenly shook Vernon by the throat.

“Seems I’ve ceased to be a free agent,” he exploded. “Has Mr. Isinglass arranged everything else for my comfort?”

He instructed me to ask if monsieur desired to see the captain.”

“What captain?”

“Of monsieur’s yacht, the *Mascot*.”

“My yacht!”

The utter impossibility of escape from the consequences of his act smote Vernon blindingly. He had set into motion forces he was powerless to resist—he was caught in the cogs of his own machinery. The wheels had begun to turn, and he must turn with them. The last thread of resistance broke with a snap.

“Here,” he said tamely, “lead the way to that bedroom. I’ll follow you.”

As he passed down the corridor Mr. Isinglass popped out a head to wish him good night. He stopped with a gesture almost childish in its impotence.

“What must I do?”

And the old man replied:

“You surely don’t imagine a lovely idea like yours was sent for nothing. Don’t worry. You’ll see. Pleasant dreams.”

CHAPTER XIV.

GIVE a man a job of work—the command of a situation—place him in the position of leader and accept his advice and ruling, withal acclaim him as a good fellow, and assuredly he shall become one. This, in all its variants, was what happened to Vernon Winslowe.

The following morning he went to the bedroom of Mr. Isinglass with the intention of making a clean breast of everything, and the peculiar old man resolutely declined to hear a word of any kind. Indeed, he did all the talking himself while he dressed, declaring that time was short and there was much too much to do to waste it in speech.

“I shall want your help in everything, Winslowe,” he said, “for, to speak the truth, I’m not a practical man at all. I imagine you came here to say that the whole business is built on rather a shaky foundation and as such it might be as well to drop it.”

“I did.”

“Well, we are not going to drop it. All treasure hunts are equally unsound in their origin, so we are no worse off than any of our predecessors. I don’t suppose a single one of us really expects to find what we are seeking, wherefore we shall have no reason for disappointment if we return empty-handed. My collar-stud is somewhere under the bed and bending is an accomplishment I do not possess. Thank you very much. There’s some fluff on your elbows and knees. If you wet that clothes-brush it will take it off. I said clothes-brush, not hair-brush. That’s the one! And now I’ve broken my braces and they’re the only pair I’ve got.”

Vernon repaired them with a piece of string.

“Capital. What a clever knot! You ought to be a sailor.”

“I was.”

“Of course you were, I remember—what a lucky thing, you’ll be able to put old Masterman through his paces.”

“Masterman?”

“Captain of my yacht. He was here at six this morning and in a very nasty temper, too. I told him to come back at eight.”

“It’s that now.”

Mr. Isinglass held a repeater to his ear and it chimed the hour.

“So it is.” He remained silent half a minute, then frowned deplly. “Masterman is late,” said he. “I’ve a good mind to give him the sack. To tell the truth, Winslowe, I’ve an idea Masterman is scared of this cruise. He’s a Mediterranean skipper, Cannes, Nice and Naples, and hasn’t been through the Canal for years. D’you know anything about the Indian Ocean yourself?”

“I think I know every drop of it.”

“Then put old Masterman through his paces and don’t mind what you say to him. Shake him up.”

Captain Masterman arrived at this moment flying an ensign of disfavour. He was disagreeable to a point of rudeness. He offered no apology for being late and replied curtly to his owner’s questions.

“Now you have a go at him, Winslowe,” said Mr. Isinglass. “Masterman, this is Lieutenant-Commander Winslowe, R.N., and I hope you’ll show him more respect than you’ve shown to me.”

But this devout wish was not realized. Captain Masterman’s truculence increased and his replies to Vernon’s catechism revealed an abysmal ignorance of the South Seas and all pertaining thereunto. In conclusion he offered a statement to the effect that if he was to sail the ship he would do so under no other guidance than his own.

“I tell you straight, sir,” he blustered through his beard, “I won’t stand for none of this Senior Service fiddle-faddle.”

“Masterman,” said Mr. Isinglass, shaking a soapy shaving-brush in his skipper’s face, “I’m surprised at you. Go into the next room and wait.”

This Masterman did, surlily enough, and when he had gone Mr. Isinglass turned to Vernon with a despairing gesture.

“Well?”

“The man is an incompetent humbug,” said Vernon. “He’s utterly unfit for his job.”

“You really think so?”

“I’m certain of it.”

Mr. Isinglass shaved for a moment in silence. Then he hurried across the room, opened the door, popped his head through and said:

“Masterman, you’re fired.”

He slammed the door quickly to obliterate the counterblast—faint echoes of which went rumbling down the passage.

“And now, Winslowe,” said Mr. Isinglass, “there’s nothing for it but you’ll have to sail the yacht yourself.”

“What!” gasped Vernon.

“A hundred pounds a month and all found. Good! That’s settled. Help me into my coat and we’ll have some breakfast. If we swallow it down quickly there’ll be time to step round to your chambers for a bag of kit—as, of course, you’ll want to stay aboard the yacht. On our way to the station we’ll drop in at my agents’ and get you signed up. There! If I haven’t forgotten to brush my teeth! Slip down to the breakfast-room and order a dish of kidneys and bacon for two. “I’ll be along in a jiffy.”

Vernon carried out his instructions in a kind of daze. Things were moving too fast for him to interfere with them now. Something else was happening, too, within his mind—an utterly unreasonable schoolboy joy was taking possession and driving away the sinister thoughts which had filled it. So tremendous was this new feeling that he descended the stairs three at a time. The past was dead—the future must look out for itself—but the present—for some astonishing cause—was pregnant with the glorious possibilities.

Where youth is, the distance between despair and elation is immeasurably small. The burden of responsibility seemed to have been shifted from his shoulders. He had got a job—a ship to sail—the seas awaited him—and——

The first person he met in the hall was Averil. Averil neatly dressed in a little dove-grey tailor-made suit and a grey hat with a scarlet wing in it.

“Hallo!” she said.

And:

“Hallo, you,” said he, and shook hands as though they had not met for years and years.

“You seem very blithe this morning.”

“I feel it,” he answered. “It’s just occurred to me somewhere between the seventh and the eighth stair that we’re off to the South Seas on a treasure hunt.”

“I know. Isn’t it marvellous?”

“Isn’t it marvellous?” he repeated.

“I’ve brought my deposit,” she said, holding out an envelope. “It was a pair of silver candelabra half an hour ago. I rang and rang at a pawnbroker’s bell until he came down and answered it.”

He became serious.

“You shouldn’t have done that.”

“Oh, nonsense. I had to. Who wouldn’t sacrifice things for experience? I worked out ways and means while you were talking last night. There are two Ming vases and a five-border ruby-back plate that I can raise the five hundred on.” She spoke seriously, then added with a laugh: “I kept them out of the wreckage of the home to have a glorious bust with if the opportunity arose.”

“But suppose,” he said, “there is no treasure after all?”

“Well, I don’t suppose for one moment there is,” she replied. “Any more than I suppose I’m going to win when I buy a ticket for the Calcutta Sweep.”

“If I told you it was the unlikeliest expedition a mortal ever started on?”

“You’d find me at the starting-post just the same.”

“You’re a gambler.”

“Yes, on the outside chance.”

He found he had taken possession of her hand.

“Look here,” he said, “bear me company in a sublime piece of folly.”

“Well?”

“Let’s believe an outsider may win. Let’s admit he never ought to have entered—but, having entered, let’s try and believe there’s a bare chance he may cover the course.”

“You say queer things,” said she.

“Let’s believe,” he pleaded. “Sometimes an inspiration comes to a crock and gives it wings.”

“But I do believe,” she answered, smiling at the tangle of racehorses and angels in his effort to express himself.

“You’re a trump,” he said.

“And where’s the inspiration to come from?” she asked.

“I think we shall take it with us,” said he. “At least, I think I shall.”

“To the Island of the Blest?”

He nodded.

“D’you know I’m to captain the vessel? The old man is signing me on this morning.”

“Mr. Isinglass?”

“Yes. His own skipper was a washout, and I found myself with the job before I could turn round.”

“He’s queer, that old man,” said Averil. “Very queer. I’ve a feeling that but for him all this would never have happened.”

“I’ve heard of woman’s instinct before,” said Vernon. “This is the proof positive.”

“He’s like a force, you know. Queer he is, and rather lovely. When he talks do you have a feeling that it is part of yourself that is talking—the better part?”

“I hadn’t thought of that.”

“It seemed so to me. As though he was using the best of everyone for the best.”

“I wonder.” He hesitated. “I say, if you’re right about him it’s an idea to cling to. I’d tremendously like to believe you are right.”

“Then let’s.”

“Yes, let’s.” He pulled himself together with a start.

“Heavens above, I’ve forgotten his kidneys.”

“Why,” she exclaimed, “there’s nothing wrong——”

A burst of pealing laughter swept over Vernon.

“For breakfast,” he said. “See you at Waterloo at 10.45.”

“I shall be there.”

With a wave of the hand he made a dash for the restaurant.

On his way down the stairs Mr. Isinglass dropped into a private room to have a word with Captain Masterman. That truculent man smiled amiably at his employer over a dish of bacon and eggs.

“Bravo, Masterman!” said Mr. Isinglass. “I would not have believed you were so good an actor. Your combination of moroseness and stupidity was most convincing. I’ve no time to waste, so tell me in as few words as possible what you think of Winslowe. Would you trust him with a ship?”

The reply was brief and satisfactory.

“From here to hell and back,” said Captain Masterman.

CHAPTER XV.

TOMMY GATES, Nurse Banbury, and William Carpenter were the absentees from the expedition to the Solent. Tommy was in bed wondering whether the doctor who gave him three months to live was not a bit of an optimist. Very ill indeed was Tommy Gates. Olive Banbury was in it up to the elbows at the hospital. There was no escape for her until the ultimate date of departure was fixed. The same applied to William.

The S.Y. *Mascot*, trim, white, elegant, produced upon the visitors an admiration that was speechless. At the first glance, as they skimmed across the water in a motor-launch, Mary Ottery was so awestruck that she never dared to raise her eyes above the level of the yacht's mirrored reflection. It seemed to her that she was seeing everything upside down that morning.

The Morgans were ecstatic, but managed, for the dignity of the city of their birth, to keep their ecstasy within decent bounds—bounds which did not extend beyond each other.

The phrase "Mother, contain yerself!" was frequently upon Joshua Morgan's lips. "Mother" in the meantime kept up a running fire of protective admonitions.

"Ee! Mind where you put your foot. You know that ankle of yours! It'll be a rare to-do if you give it a twist."

Lydia La Rue maintained an unbroken silence and smoked heaps of cigarettes. She had entered another world.

Henry Julius, not unnaturally, spoke of other yachts with which he was familiar—better yachts whose owners possessed very splendid names with an Eastern flavour. He did not disparage the *Mascot*—in fact, he patted it, so to speak, upon the beam. Nevertheless, he wished to convey the impression that whatever might be the case with the rest of the company,

his own marine experiences had been conducted on luxurious lines. Ever susceptible to environment, his language assumed a salt-sea flavour more effective to the ignorant hearer than to the informed.

“You never saw the *Elsinore*, Mr. Morgan. Old Seligman’s yacht—Otto Seligman—the chap that bought the Naveby Velasquez—asked my advice about that, he did—splendid picture—sold it to the Chicago Gallery for half a million. Dollars, of course. Ho, the *Elsinore* was a boat—clipper-built, lovely lines—and move—— He wanted to put me up for the Royal Yacht Club, Seligman did, but I couldn’t spare the time. Done much yachting yourself?”

“Me and the missus once had a trip in *Skylark*,” was Joshua Morgan’s reply, delivered in a manner calculated to suggest that he had heard all he wanted to hear about the *Elsinore*.

Henry Julius was driven to deliver the remainder of his nautical experiences into the ear of Mary Ottery, who was much too far advanced in amazement to understand a word he said.

While he talked Henry became sadly aware that the braided coat and vest, the check trousers and patent leather boots he was wearing were a trifle out of keeping with his surroundings. He made a mental note to refit for the cruise on appropriate lines.

Meanwhile Vernon Winslowe was occupied in taking over and inspecting his new command. His delight in the *Mascot* was unalloyed. From truck to counter she was perfect. With a navy man’s thoroughness he made an inspection of every part of the yacht, from one end to the other, cabin and engine-room alike. He emerged from his inspection hot, greasy and exuberant. He grasped Mr. Isinglass by the hand and declared:

“She’s a pearl beyond price.”

“You’re pleased with her?”

“Oh, man!” said Vernon, for he had been speaking a moment before to a Scotch engineer. “Oh, man!” Then, with a fall in tone: “But I don’t deserve her.”

Here was an incoherence that was eloquent.

“And when will you be ready to sail?”

“Give me ten days.”

The news went round like wildfire.

Ten days—then freedom—treasure—and the world beyond. In the motor-launch that took them ashore Mrs. Morgan broke a long silence to say:

“It’s rum to think that place we’re going to is under our feet at present moment.”

And:

“Is it?” said Mary Ottery. “It seems to me it’s right above our heads,” and she looked up into the blue.

The manner in which these various people spent the eve and morning of the departure is perhaps worthy of note.

Joshua Morgan gave a banquet in the Masonic Room at the Royal Bull hotel, at which a great deal was eaten and drunk of good solid foods and ripe wines. At the close of the meal he delivered himself of a pioneer address of such prodigious length that many of his audience fell asleep and his loving wife was driven to pinch him back to his seat again.

The address began with the words:

“Councillors, colleagues, fellow-tradesmen and your good ladies.”

It told how he and Kate had worked hard to advance themselves and the glory of Bradford. It offered violence to any man who should arise and declare that his business methods had ever been less than “fair and above-board.” (“Hear, hear.”)

“Though,” with a twinkle, “I’m not above admitting I’m a hard man when it comes to a bargain and I know which end of stick to lay m’ hand on.”

Appreciative laughter from those present, who felt they could claim a parallel virtue.

“They do say,” he pursued, “as travel broadens the mind of a man—as doubtless some of you will admit when I come back and reveal new attributes of business and urban kind.”

This theme he developed to such an extent that it would

appear that the future welfare of the Midlands mainly reposed in the most immediate departure for the South Seas. Nothing short of that—it seemed—could save civilization.

At last he was pinched and jolted back into his chair, amidst a tumult of applause heartily supported by the rudely awakened sleepers.

On the curb outside the hotel, Joshua rocked a trifle unsteadily upon his heels. The moon was playing tricks with the chimney-stacks, twisting and curving their upright silhouettes into the likeness of waving palm fronds.

“Old Bradford,” said Joshua Morgan, “old Bradford, and we’re leaving her.” He blinked and put out a hand to find his wife’s arm. “Lead me gently, Kate, for there’s a strange feeling within.”

His was not the only party given that night, for Lydia La Rue had sent out invitations and there had come to supper at her flat in Charing Cross Road three gentlemen with very good evening-dress suits and very bad manners. It was clear that they were surprised and resentful at meeting one another. The supper party was a departure from the conventional tête-à-tête to which they were more accustomed. They could not understand. Lydia supplied them with lobster mayonnaise and champagne—and enlightenment. She said, at the conclusion of the meal:

“I got you together here—all three of you—to say this: I’m going away and I pray God it will be so far away that I never meet any more beasts of your sort. That’s all, and now you can get out.”

The three gentlemen with very good evening-dress suits—never forgetting their bad manners—went out leaving Lydia to fling herself on the bed and cry noisily and chuck things about and sweep a whole trayful of creams and cosmetics on to the floor—from which, half an hour later, she rescued and packed them.

On the last day of his employment by the G.P.O., William Carpenter brooded in silence the while he prepared in his mind words to prelude his departure. They were burning words destined for all to hear—words such as should

break down prison walls and set men thinking with shame in their hearts of the cowardice of accepting captivity. William Carpenter estimated that what he had to say would take at least ten minutes. Then, with head thrown back, he would march out gloriously and none should bid him stay.

Eight o'clock was the time chosen for this fine panegyric, and until eight William was busy at its preparation.

The clock struck with unexpected clarity and a man at the next section marked "Telegrams" said:

"Awfully sorry you're going, ol' man, awfully sorry."

"Yes," stammered William, "so am I rather."

"Was hoping we might have had a few more evening walks when the days got longer."

"Yes," said William again. "They were jolly, those walks."

"Well, best of luck, ol' man."

"Best of luck," he replied.

Then he took his hat and coat from a peg and went to the South Seas, with a lump in his throat.

Tommy Gates spent his last night ashore with a bronchitis kettle and a Saratoga trunk.

There was nothing spectacular about Nurse Olive Banbury's departure. She kept a taxi with her luggage aboard waiting in a side street by the hospital. She was busy until the last moment at a particularly vile operation for cancer. When it was finished she slipped away quietly to clean up. It was not until then she knew she was free, and she marked the knowledge in a peculiar way. An open window adjoined the lavatory-basin, and through it she cast a square of carbolic soap. Then from a pink wrapper with a floral paper seal she drew a tablet of Roger & Gallet's Carnation soap and with it luxuriously washed her hands to the smell of cottage gardens.

Meanwhile the activities of Henry Julius were many and various, being mainly divided between sundry firms of Theatrical Costumiers and the promotion of a small company for the future success of which he was not so sanguine

as to consider his continued residence in Great Britain would be either necessary or expedient. He purchased his travelling-kit from Theatrical Costumiers in preference to orthodox tailors, because they were better able to supply his multifarious needs. A small picture-dealing business which he conducted in the name of Botticelli, Ltd., was sold under the hammer at an agreeable profit—he himself acting as agent for the purchaser and netting a trifling matter of five per cent. on the deal. Thus he was free to go his ways with the pleasant sense of having spent his time to advantage.

Viewed in comparison with all previous experience, the adventure confronting Mary Ottery was so stupendous as to deprive her of the power to refer to it to anyone. Her emotions were terrific and she bottled them up in her own small bosom, where they greatly interfered with the normal working of her heart and lungs. As a result she was permanently out of breath and subsisted mainly on essence of peppermint and hot water. On the day following her visit to the *Mascot* she bought herself a Willesden canvas cabin-trunk, three cotton frocks, a Panama hat, a sketch-book, and a diary. And every night she was busy until the small hours were beginning to get bigger, packing and repacking those purchases and such of her old belongings as might prove useful on the voyage. And all the while she was obsessed with the ghastly fear that at any moment she would wake up and find it was all a dream. The very sound of an approaching postman brought about an instant syncope.

On the last night of all she did not sleep a wink, but sat by the open window of her room until the dawn fringed the black horizon of the east and the sun came creeping up above the blue network of slates and chimney-stacks. Even her landlady was ignorant of Mary's plans. The most she had been able to say was:

“I shan't be wanting my room for a little while, so if you care to let it——”

At nine o'clock on the fateful day she knocked at the kitchen door and wondered if Mrs. Mitcham could spare her son to get a taxi.

Mrs. Mitcham could.

The taxi duly arrived and Mary's beautiful Willesden canvas trunk was placed upon it.

"And where should I forward letters, miss, should any arrive?" was asked.

Mary Ottery took a tremendous grip on herself, fighting against the forces of silence that almost strangled her.

"Poste Restante, Honolulu," she gasped, and dived shamefully into the protective gloom of the taxi.

At three o'clock that afternoon the *Mascot* steamed slowly down the Solent. Opposite Ryde she spread tier upon tier of beautiful white wings and slanted through the dipping water towards the South.

CHAPTER XVI.

TO the untravelled, first impressions of a sea voyage are very much alike. They begin with admiration for the neatness and completeness of a ship's cabin—an admiration changing into doubt as to where all one's belongings shall be bestowed. Follows an immediate desire for something to eat, which when realized gives place to vague dislike for the queer ship flavour which seems to permeate everything. Persons unaccustomed to the cardboardy taste of dried milk begin to wonder what tea would be like drunk neat—and find the experiment a disappointment. The business of unpacking being concluded, the womenfolk take vital interest as to the particular spot on which their deck chairs shall be placed—a proceeding not infrequently accompanied by jealous feelings directed against more successful competitors. The men being denied their usual avocations, and having leaned against the bulwarks for as long as their natures can endure, revise the drinking laws which in the past have governed them and decide that four o'clock in the afternoon is not too soon for “having one.” And since the practice of “having one” is merely a euphemistic way of expressing having several, the first few hours of a sea voyage are usually marred by alcoholic excesses. Following on the temporary exuberance thus engendered, come misgivings as to one's ability to “stand very much of this sort of life,” come calculations as to what is the earliest date one may hope to reach a port of landing. In short, gloom descends where originally happiness and delight transcended. And since gloom is the doorkeeper to *mal de mer*, grief of mind is quickly transformed into grief of body. The sea, from having been complimented on its amiable smoothness, is condemned as a restless, turbulent fel-

low, without a kindly thought for other people's troubles.

Little matters which at first proved entertaining, such as the clanging of the ship's bell—an operation which, to the landsman, appears to have no conceivable relation to accepted measurements of time—become of a sudden a source of irritation. Bunks, which when tested in port provided an acme of luxury, reveal themselves to be barren of comfort and fruitful of despair.

There is nothing in the world more difficult of adjustment than the temperament of a landsman to life at sea. He suspects and dislikes nearly everyone. He is sullen and morose by turns. He is sorry for himself and no one else. He is sick, sore, angry and bored. He cannot read with interest nor eat with comfort. He is tired of sitting down and cannot be bothered to stand up. If it chances he is acquainted with modern poetry, the thought of Mr. Masefield's "Sea Ballads" fills him with murderous indignation. That a man who by experience should have known better could set his pen to the task of writing such lines as:

"I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I need is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,"

is a matter that should be dealt with by the public executioner.

It may be that the passengers of the *Mascot* were unusually unfortunate, for the fine weather that smiled on them in the Solent gave place to wind and running seas ere they came abreast of Portland Bill. The waves ran steep and sent great slaps of spray over the yacht's side, ruining a pair of white ducks Henry Julius was wearing, and filling Joshua Morgan's tobacco pouch with water. These two gentlemen—who were feeling far from well—showed a disposition to blame each other for this mishap, and words were exchanged on both sides.

Tommy Gates had retired to his cabin, and lay gasping in his bunk. The sea had no terrors for the boy; he was too ill in other ways for so minor an affair as rough water to affect him. Olive Banbury sat on a camp stool in his cabin for as long as she could stand it. Wheels were

revolving in her head, and she was scarcely able to keep her eyes open, since the dreadful vision of an appearing and disappearing horizon made her giddy. It occurred to her as odd that the first day of her freedom should be spent at a bedside. Her sense of duty, however, was too strong to shirk the responsibility. She had wanted to be on deck, watching the coast of England go slowly by, and instead here she was back at her job again and listening to a man fighting for breath. It is terribly difficult to escape from one's accustomed self.

"But I must get over these beastly qualms," she thought, "or I'll be a precious lot of good to the boy."

Presently he said:

"It's frightfully nice of you sticking here with me—why not go on deck for a spell? You look awfully green. Is it rough or something?"

"Rough," she repeated. "Good Lord!"

"Don't bother about me."

"No bother. Besides, I'll be sick if I move." She paused for a moment and pressed her forehead with both hands. "Come to that, I'll be sick anyway." Then, suddenly: "Sorry," and she fled.

Olive Banbury believed in saying what she meant. She possessed the quality of frank coarseness which belongs to naturally refined beings.

In the little corridor she passed Lydia La Rue, who was disgustingly smoking a Russian cigarette.

"That's swank," she said as she hurried by.

"No, it isn't," said Lydia, but as she wanted to create a good impression she threw away the cigarette—glad of the chance, perhaps. She had already lost her temper once since she came on board, and did not want to gain a reputation for ill humour. The cause of her temper was William Carpenter, who had made himself a nuisance by offering to do odds and ends to promote her comfort. Lydia was a good analyst of other people's minds, and in half a glance had read the admiration she had inspired in the big hulking young man. She did not want admiration—certainly not

his. Of all types she had the least use for your clumsy, calf-like fellow. If he fancied he was likely to cut ice with her, the sooner he was disillusioned the better. She had told him she could put up her own chair and fetch her own coat—and advised him to get a piece of string and amuse himself tying knots in it. So William went away disconsolate, and presently, seeing a nice little “ladder,” he climbed up and found himself alongside Vernon on the bridge.

Vernon was going to order him below peremptorily when a kindly instinct warned him that the intrusion was born of ignorance.

“This is a jolly place,” said William. “I’d like to stop here—may I?”

Vernon grinned at him amiably and shook his head. A quartermaster at the wheel also grinned.

“Sorry,” said Vernon, “reserved for navigation and all that. Old sea law, Carpenter, that mustn’t be abused. Love to have you otherwise.”

So William Carpenter went down blushfully, and thought what a good sort Vernon Winslowe was and wondered what he could do to show it.

Vernon himself was happier than he would have believed possible. He had but to lick his lips and a taste of salt was upon them. Beneath his feet the little yacht thrilled and pulsed with life as she drilled through the leaping seas. He was in his element—gorgeously and completely. Now and again his eyes shifted from the mottled grey horizon to the figure of a girl in brown oilskins who leant over the prow of the *Mascot* and laughed at the slapping spray that drenched her face and hair.

That night, to the best of her ability, Mary Ottery made her first attempt as a diarist.

“The weather is beginning to be rough,” she wrote, “so rough that I foresee I shall have to postpone writing what I feel about it until other feelings which I have feel easier.”

That was all. A brief entry, but eloquent. The phrase “beginning to be rough” was prophetic, and for four days the *Mascot* cavorted in a Bay of Biscay circus that included

every possible item in the program. Vernon was scarcely off the bridge, and the esteem he won from passengers and crew alike was boundless. The first officer, a competent young fellow named Rogers, declared that but for his seamanship they might well have had to send out "the old how-do-you-do" (this being his particular method of referring to an S.O.S.). For twenty-four hours they scarcely made any headway to speak of. The decks were swept from end to end by heavy seas. Three of the lifeboats were staved in, and their davits were twisted like spaghetti. Stays and rigging were swept overboard and a skylight was smashed, the saloon below and some adjoining cabins being flooded with water. From a mariner's point of view it was lively enough; from a passenger's, it was hell. The relief of everyone was immense when, on the evening of the fifth day, they slipped into the harbour at Cadiz and dropped anchor.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEY spent a week in Cadiz undergoing repairs. In an English port the work could have been carried out in a couple of days, but the Spanish habit of *Mañana* prolonged operations. Vernon was anxious to get under way again as soon as possible, but the majority of the passengers were grateful enough for the respite ashore.

Their initiation to the seas had been a trifle over the odds, and had it not been that they awoke on the morning after the ordeal of the storm to find a bright sun shining on a white, close-packed town, to the smell of flowers and foreign ports, and a general hint and promise of a brighter, smoother future, it is possible some of them would have thrown in their hands and returned to England.

Arrangements were made for a party to go ashore. They went, under the ægis of Mr. Isinglass, who revealed new and remarkable talents as a linguist. His handling of would-be guides, youths importunate to clean even the cleanest boots, waiters in cafés, and the army of pedlars who besiege visitors for the purpose of selling the claws of crayfish, draughts of drinking-water at a halfpenny a mug, and great bunches of roses and lilies, was beyond all praise.

“It was here,” said Mary Ottery, “that the great Drake singed the Spanish king’s—or was it admiral’s?—beard. Though,” she added, “I am never very clear in my mind how he did it.”

“Queer you should have mentioned Drake,” observed Henry Julius, “for, as it happens, he was a sort of ancestor of mine.”

Joshua Morgan, who overheard this improbable assertion, remarked:

“Aye, I guessed as much from the way that buffeting

turned you up, Mr. Julius. They do say as Drake never could stomach a rough passage.”

Henry ignored the satire and proceeded to give reasons for claiming this distinguished relation. Mary Ottery was too filled with amazement at finding herself in a real Spanish town to pay much heed to what was being said. Vaguely she imagined Henry Julius was lying, but, even so, she was not greatly concerned. Nevertheless, she was rather astonished that he should bother to try and produce an effect upon anyone so unimportant as herself. After all, what could her admiration be worth that he should strut in fine feathers to win it? For a moment the question interested and perhaps intrigued her. Life was full of surprises, especially that morning. There were surprises in costume, in habit, and in architecture—and a whole palette full of surprises in colour. Henry Julius was marvellous about colour. Metaphorically he squeezed little dabs of it from mental tubes upon a canvas of words. “It was very pleasant,” as Mary subsequently wrote in her diary, “to hear him talk in art shades.” She used this phrase because her æsthetic education had never been developed beyond the early stage which believed that any scheme of coloration carried out in what she termed “pastel tints” (a range which covers all the saddest and milkiest moods of cinnamon and green) must surely be regarded as the sublime terminus of Art. Had she known herself better—as subsequent experience provided knowledge—she would have been quick to realize that in this matter she was guilty of an affectation. For though she expressed polite admiration for gradations of white and *eau-de-nil*, in reality the garden of her soul was laid out with scarlet poppies and high plumes of larkspur. Some realization of this first came to her when Henry pointed out a wine-dark splash of purple bougainvillea spilled across a yellow wall.

“See it,” he cried, pointing with a painter’s thumb. “See the fierce intensity of it? That’s Art—true, full-blooded Art. Colour, that is—colour that sings with a voice like poor Caruso’s.”

It marked an epoch in the life of Mary Ottery. From that hour onward her taste for grey broadened into a need for something ruddier. It was as though a crimson ray from the falling sun had streaked across a leaden sky. Oddly enough, what Julius had said had the more far-reaching effect of forming a basis of friendship between them. Nor was that all, for in the course of the day spent ashore Mary Ottery threw away her pince-nez—or, rather, presented them to a child—declaring, and with truth, that she “saw a great deal better without them.”

The result was to take years off her appearance. Henry Julius had laid aside the super-yachting costume which it was his habit to wear on board, and was arrayed in an ultra-Riviera suiting embellished with a pair of brown suède shoes. There seemed to be no end to his sartorial resources.

As Mrs. Morgan remarked in the private ear of her husband:

“Wonder is he didn’t come out as one of them toreadors and be done with it.”

Mr. Morgan made no audible reply—his attention being occupied in looking at Lydia. This fact was noted by his wife with misgiving.

“Ee well,” she observed, “there’s strange folks among us, and I misdoubt there’ll be trouble afore we gets safely home to Bradford.”

Lydia was attracting more attention than she desired. William Carpenter was the chief offender. The homely young man was never out of her sight. Even though she treated him with calculated rudeness, he always bobbed up with fresh offers of service. To make matters worse, Lydia was out of temper again. She had asked Vernon to come ashore, and he had refused—quite off-handedly, as though by refusing he denied himself nothing. It had made her angry, for she liked Vernon with one of those fierce, impulsive likings which in the past had almost invariably produced a reciprocal liking. He appealed to her as a man, with that odd nervy quality of his and sudden descents from gaiety to

gloom. There was a recklessness and authority about him that attracted her to a point of exasperation. His moments of chivalrous regard, followed by lapses of complete inattention, as though his mind could not be held long by a single interest—his obvious efficiency and command—his smile, his hair, his hands—a combination of these qualities aroused in Lydia a consuming desire to attract his notice. He must have been aware of the fact, and yet he seemed to shun rather than court her society. Lydia was not used to being shunned. True, she had come away to escape from the muddle these insurgent feelings had always involved her in—she had come away to escape from herself and the consequences of her old self. She had killed her old self on the night of the supper party, when the three gentlemen in good dress-suits had been sent from her doors. She had purged the past with the hot, angry tears she shed, and yet here was her old self cropping up again, greedy, predatory, yearning. That was why she turned on William Carpenter with such savagery when a civil impulse persuaded him to take her arm at a crossing.

“If you touch me again,” she stormed, “I’ll hit you across the mouth.”

He fell back a pace and gasped.

“I—I’m awfully sorry—b-b-but you’d have run into that b-b-bullock cart—her—hum!”

“Oh, can’t you cure yourself of that stammer?”

“I don’t know,” he answered. “I’ll t-try.”

After all, one can do no more than try. But our natures are not susceptible to swift changes. They run their accustomed courses through the channels of long habit. *Vide* the case of Olive Banbury, who had stayed on the *Mascot* to nurse a sick man. And listen to Joshua Morgan speculating as to whether “Young Tim has bought that consignment of Manchester goods to advantage.”

Henry Julius moved to the side of Mr. Isinglass to ask in the naïvest way:

“At all interested in mining shares, Mr. Isinglass?”

And Mary Ottery said to Kate Morgan:

“I’m sure that parcel is bothering you; do let me carry it.”

Ethiopians all!

CHAPTER XVIII.

VERNON seldom went ashore. His days were occupied supervising the repairs to the *Mascot*, and for the most part he spent the evenings in his cabin busying himself with ocean charts and his own reflections. A firm conviction, inspired by the unfailing optimism of Mr. Isinglass in human nature, was growing in his mind that somehow he would be given the power to carry the enterprise through to a successful conclusion. Clearly it was useless to hope that a tangible treasure would be found, but in the last two weeks he had come to apply a wider application to the word treasure than its mere financial significance. He asked himself, of what is treasure composed? Surely not of doubloons and pieces of eight. It came to him that of a few hurried words exchanged in an early morning with a girl he scarcely knew—that of the knowledge of her nearness—of a now and then sight of her with cheeks glistening from the upflung spray, a man might fill a treasure chest to overflowing.

He ran over in his mind the motives and ambitions which brought together the odd company, drawn by his will-o'-the-wisp advertisement. And of them all only Henry Julius had declared a desire for money. The magnet pulled the rest in many different ways, toward adventure, escape, health, toil and amazement. Surely, surely the power might be granted to give them generously of these.

For this reason Vernon spent much time alone, racking his brains as to what means he should employ.

The subscribed capital of the company was five thousand pounds, and that money, by hook or by crook, he determined should be repaid to the investors on the day they set foot on English soil again. Of his own original fortune, nothing

remained. There was a possibility he might raise a bit on what he would inherit from his uncle, Fletcher Winslow, in accordance with the terms of his late grandfather's will. But Fletcher Winslowe had always lived expensively, and, since the administration of thyroid had given him a new lease of life, it was unreasonable to suppose that a large sum could be raised on the reversion. The question, however, was worth investigating, and an idea came to Vernon that he would write to Ralph Whittaker and enlist his aid.

"My dear old Ralph," he wrote. "If you haven't chucked this into the fire, I want you to help me out of a tangle. I dare say if you showed this letter to the police and told them what you know of the business, they would make arrangements by cable for my arrest. In case you believe it would be a good job if they did, I enclose a list of ports we shall call at, with the approximate dates of arrival. You must do what you think right about this. As regards that schoolboy promise of ours, I call it off and leave you to act as you please. I was in a black mood that day you came and looked me up—in a black, revengeful temper—and I confess now my aim was to get back at the world for the shabby way I felt it had treated me. That advertisement of mine was intended to rope in a crowd of sharks whom I meant to bleed all I knew how. What's happened has defeated me, for, instead of sharks, I find myself in such a company of sportsmen as I didn't believe existed."

Followed a description of what took place at the supper party.

"They trusted me, Ralph, and, though it must sound like a lie to say so, I hadn't the heart to tell them the truth. It seemed to me I had started something that just had to go on. Call it cowardice, if you like, but, having opened the door on this adventure, I lacked the courage to bang it in their faces. I suppose I am an ass to believe I shall ever scrape out of the mess with a rag of character left to me, but, win or lose, I'm going to have a shot at it.

"I've been given command of this yacht, and she's a marvel—yes, and I think I've got some sort of command of

myself too. "Tanyrate, I'm trying to sort out the angry muddle I've made of things and clean up what's left. One thing is certain, these folk must have a run for their money, and, having had it, they must have their money returned. And this is where you can help me."

Followed a number of details about lawyers and wills and reversionary securities, and a good many more or less technical queries.

"Even if they'd let me have five thousand, I'd take it," he concluded. "Do your best for me, Ralph, and if you can raise the cash send it in a lump c/o MacAndrews, Ltd., Honolulu. You might send a cable if you're really a pal. Western code, for preference. I'll see a lawyer tomorrow, and fix up power of attorney for you on my behalf. The British Vice-Consul should be able to help me in that."

He had almost finished writing when there was a knock at his cabin door, and Averil came in.

"Am I being a nuisance?" she asked.

"Hardly," he said, "but I thought you were ashore."

"I was, but I came back for something."

"Have I got it?"

She smiled.

"In a sense, yes. I came back for you."

"That was very nice of you."

"It's Sunday," said Averil. "Nobody ever works on Sunday—it's unhealthy and unreligious. Besides, I want an escort."

"An escort—where to?"

She seated herself on the corner of his writing-table and stared at the ceiling.

"There's some talk of going to a bull-fight. That Julius person started it. There's one at San Fernando this afternoon. He spoke of hiring a car and taking us over. Of course, we pay our own fares and all that, but—well, I don't know."

Vernon leant back in his chair.

"My first impression of you being of a girl who was

extraordinarily nice to her horses, I should say, at a guess that you do know."

Averil nodded.

"Oh, of course, I don't really want to go. I'm certain I should hate it. But, as a matter of fact, there aren't any horses—at least to-day there aren't. It's one of those—what do you call 'em?—Novia affairs—*Noviadas*."

"Yes?"

She continued to stare at the ceiling.

"In a way, I think I'd like to go rather—not because it's beastly—but to harden one somehow."

"To harden one?" he repeated.

"Yes. It's a matter of pluck—being frightened of taking a risk. Oh! it's easy enough to say it's against one's conscience to see a thing like that, but I think, sometimes, conscience is only another name for funk, don't you?"

It was Vernon's turn to nod.

"If I wasn't a funk I wouldn't want to go, but you see I rather despise people who shrink."

"Do you?" he replied. "Well, it's a forward policy."

"I'd have despised you," she said with sudden frankness, "if you'd shrunk from tackling this treasure hunt."

"Even in face of very real doubts as to whether I ought to?"

"Even in face of a certainty," said Averil. "I think one ought to be as brave as one's impulse—always. It's a certainty, I suppose, that I shall hate this bull-fight."

"Then you've made up your mind to go?"

"Well, I didn't much want to go with that Julius person. That's rank snobbery, of course."

"Then oughtn't you to go with him?" asked Vernon, with a laugh.

"Yes, that's fair enough. But if you'd come I'd rather—I don't want to develop all my virtues in a single afternoon."

"All right," he said. "But they don't start these shows till five o'clock, and it won't take more than an hour to get there."

“Oh! There’s not a scrap of hurry if you want to work.”

“I’ve only this letter to finish,” said he, “and an envelope to address. Take that chair.”

“I’m not in the way?”

“You are not.”

“May I look at this?”

He glanced round and saw she had picked up Roger Winslowe’s log-book which an hour before he had taken from his uniform case with the vague intention of reading. He thought he had put it away, and was surprised to see it in her hands. He hesitated a second before answering.

“I’m afraid you’ll find it very dull.”

She turned a page and screwed up her face at the writing.

“Whatever is it?”

He told her; there was no point in concealing the truth.

“The book I found, in company with the map, when I was a boy.”

Averil’s eyes sparkled with excitement.

“How marvellous!” she cried; and down went her head over the closely-written pages.

Vernon wound up his letter to Ralph in an unexpectedly cheerful vein, which to one unacquainted with its cause must have seemed remarkable. It was as though an orchestra, after favouring an audience with a fugue in a minor key, suddenly cast melancholy aside and rounded off the entertainment with a few bright major chords.

He was in the act of addressing the envelope when a sharp exclamation arrested him.

“I say, here are the very words Willie Carpenter read from the map.”

He had overlooked the possibility that she would find the entry which he had copied on the calico chart of Trefusis Island. That she had done so for the moment deprived him of the power to reply.

He did not turn his head, but continued to write, while a sickening sense of having been found out developed him.

“Yes,” he said. “Yes. So you’ve come across that.”

“They’re the very words,” she continued excitedly. “Did you know they were here?”

“Yes, I knew.”

She brought over the book and laid it on the table before him. The light from the low port-hole struck across the surface of the paper, sharply defining the deep, scratchy writing which floundered across the middle of an otherwise blank page.

“*Needle rock meridian, Point of Shadow 15 paces due North 3 West and under,*” ran the words.

“How frightfully exciting,” she went on. “Is the writing on the map in the same hand?”

He hesitated—determined not to lie to her. Then:

“Judge for yourself.”

A moment later Averil was comparing the entry on the map with that in the log-book.

“They’re exactly alike. But it seems so funny he should have written only this and nothing to signify what it meant.”

“I don’t know,” said Vernon. “They were wild days, remember. He didn’t want to leave clues lying about, I expect.”

“No—no, of course not.”

She was on her knees now, staring at the page as though by sheer concentration she would wring a secret from its blankness. Suddenly she gave a start and pointed.

“I say—look. When the light strikes across it looks as if the surface of this page has been scraped or rubbed or something—just as if there once were other words which have been erased. Do look! No, don’t move it.”

He knelt beside her, his eyes level with hers and their two heads almost touching. She was right; the page had been tampered with. It reflected the light unevenly when seen foreshortened. Also the page appeared to be slightly corrugated, as though some sharp instrument had scraped across it in parallel lines to erase written matter.

“I believe you’re right,” he exclaimed. His hands were shaking and sweat had started from his forehead.

Averil drummed her fists on the blotting-pad.

“Oh, oh, oh! How perfectly maddening,” she wailed. “I dare say something frightfully important was written there. Hold it up to the light.”

He did, and the experiment instantly proved the accuracy of their theory, for the page was more translucent in some places than in others. In one particular spot there was a definite perforation where the point of the knife had pierced the paper. But this was not the only fact revealed. Whoever had been responsible for scraping out the lines had been far more thorough at the centre of the page than at the edges. In the centre the lines were scraped deeply, but at the edges the thickness of the paper was almost the same as the untampered-with portions.

Vernon was breathing hard when he laid the book on the table again.

“Isn't it a fearful shame!” said Averil.

He did not reply. He was busy unscrewing the lens from a pair of powerful binoculars, an operation considerably delayed by excitement. At last:

“That's got it,” he exclaimed, and bent to a fresh examination of the edges of the page. After a minute he stood back, shook his head with a kind of savage disappointment.

“I can make out nothing. Whoever did the job must have polished the surface afterwards with a finger-nail.”

Averil held out her hand for the glass.

“Do let me see.”

Women have marvellous nerves. They can be excited without tingling. Averil's hand was steady as a rock while she focused the glass. After what seemed an age she laid a finger on a particular spot and said:

“Look there. I'm not sure—but aren't there some scratches?”

He did as she bade him with a sense of returning hope, and sure enough detected some faint scratches covering about three-quarters of an inch in the polished trough left by the knife and the finger-nail.

“You're right. Here, wait a bit. Ring that bell.”

“What for?”

“I want a piece of bread.”

“I’ll fetch it. I couldn’t bear a steward to come in now.”

When she returned with a slice of crumbly bread she found Vernon scraping the lead of a hard pencil with a razor blade.

“I believe the real nuts use graphite for this job,” he observed. “For all I know, we may dish the whole business, but nothing ventured——”

“What’s the idea?”

“I’m going to blow this stuff all over those scratches and pray that some of it will stick.”

“And the bread?”

“To clean up afterwards. What’s in the scratches ought to be the last to go.”

“Sounds pretty forlorn,” she said.

“Shall we risk it?”

“Of course, risk it.”

“Here goes, then.”

He puffed a cloud of the fine lead-dust over the spot, then lightly smeared it with a forefinger.

“All or nothing,” he said. “Give me the bread.”

Their excitement was intense as he rubbed it across the grey mark on the page, and their heads bumped as they bent forward simultaneously to examine the result. To the naked eye nothing was detectable. It was a triumph of chivalry to hand her the lens before using it himself. Even Averil was shaking then.

“Well?”

“I don’t—half a second, though—there’s—it looks like numbers.”

“Numbers. Go on.”

“There’s a little ‘h,’ then a ‘one,’ and, yes, a ‘five,’ then a space and a capital ‘W,’ another space, room for about five letters and—well, it might be a ‘three.’ ”

“And that’s all?”

She turned despondently.

“That’s all.”

“Give me the lens.” The excitement had died out of his

voice. It sounded dull to the point of despair. After he had looked for a while he wrote this on the blotting-paper:

“——h 15—— W———3.”

“It means nothing.”

“Nothing,” he repeated.

“Oh, well,” she said, with an effort to be cheerful, “it doesn’t matter, does it? We’ve got the map.”

“Yes, we’ve got the map.” He coloured as he spoke and looked across at it shamefacedly. In the top left-hand corner under the arrow of orientation was written, Trefusis Island, North 159, West 23.

Crash came his fist on the desk, and he sprang to his feet, a wild excitement in his eyes.

Averil stared at him in amazement.

“What do you mean?”

The little cabin fairly rang with the sound of his voice:

“North 159, West 23.”

“I don’t understand.”

“There, look!” pointing at the map—“and here! Fill in these gaps. Trefusis Island. Don’t you see?—longitude and latitude, and they’re both the same.”

“Oh, now I see, but”—she looked at him mystified—“but how’s that help? It doesn’t. We knew it already.”

Vernon’s hands dropped to his side.

“Yes,” he answered lamely. “Of course—stupid of me.”

“It tells us nothing.”

“No—only a verification—that’s all.”

“Well, if we’re going to the fight, I’d better change,” said Averil.

“Right. I’ll put this stuff away and meet you on deck.”

As she turned to go a sudden impulse drove Vernon to throw out a hand and seize one of hers. She did not withdraw it, but looked up to ask:

“Yes, why?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “I just felt rather wonderful about you, that’s all.”

“Rather wonderful?”

“Um! Togetherish. I don’t know—but as if you’d done

something tremendous for me and I'd a great wave of gratitude."

"What, those few scratches?"

"Ah, don't underrate them," he pleaded, "because we found them together—you and I—kneeling there—our heads almost touching."

She looked at him half smiling, half puzzled.

"I may seem to be talking rot, but all through this business I've felt a bit lonely—isolated—and these few minutes we've spent together—our discovery——"

"We haven't discovered much."

"I have," he said, and tightened his grasp on her hand.

She gave a little laugh and her cheeks coloured. Then:

"Hm!" she said; "have you?" and, drawing away her hand, ran quickly from the cabin.

For a long while he stood watching the door through which she had passed until slowly his thoughts reverted to that other, that lesser discovery he had made. He turned and picked up the log-book.

"Roger, Roger, old man. Am I right—does this entry mean that there's a clean way out—that the treasure's there—is the lie I told going to turn into a truth?"

It had been Mr. Isinglass's idea that there should be a parrot on board. He had argued that no treasure hunt was complete without one. During the last few days the old man had busied himself trying to teach the unwilling bird the proper slogan for such an adventure. From the deck above, its voice rang out in a croaking falsetto:

"You're drunk, you fool, drunk! You're drunk!"

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW often it happens in the early stages of something more than friendship that a sudden impulse of intimacy is followed by a mood of awkwardness!

Averil and Vernon had been very nearly lovers in the moment before she left his cabin to change. It was strange that ten minutes later, when they met on deck, it should have been shyly and almost as strangers. Intimacy builds up its own barriers to check its own advance. Those tentative hours and days between men and women which occur before they come out into the light with their real feelings for each other are too precious, too unrepeatable for Nature to allow her children to scamper through them with hurrying feet. Who does not remember that acute morning bashfulness which follows the first clean kiss given and returned beneath the overnight moon? For every forward step a lover takes, there is a half-one backward in the direction of commonplace. Thus is preserved the mystery of the world's greatest gift. Love is too old and exquisite a wine to be drunk otherwise than in little sips. The man who swallows it at a gulp will find that even though it mounts to his head it shall not stay in his heart. Therefore, as commonplace beings those two met, and Vernon's first remark was to bid her beware of the step-up at the top of the accommodation ladder. His awkwardness, however, could not entirely override his sense of exuberance, and he showed more than a disposition to sing as the little dinghy bounced them towards the shore. Arrived at the landing-stage, he must needs take her a long way out of the right direction for the purpose of buying a bunch of roses, which when bought proved far too large and cumbersome to carry on an expedition.

Accordingly he gave away the roses, all save two or three which Averil retained, to a knot of small children who, with that peculiar evidence of interest invariably excited by foreigners, were pattering along in the wake. Furthermore, he exchanged pleasantries with the children, and added to their delight by vanishing a penny and producing it again from behind a small olive ear.

Normally he would not have behaved in this fashion—shyness was the cause—shyness and apprehension as to what he would say next unless he played the fool.

Meanwhile, Averil watched him with a kind of perplexed wonder and half-understanding. She, too, was glad of this respite—of this breathing-space in the travel of their affairs.

“For a man who has suffered a big disappointment,” she said, “you seem absurdly high-spirited. I like that quality in you awfully.”

“If there’s anything in me you like awfully,” he said, “I’m glad. But what quality?”

“I don’t know—bounce, buoyance.”

He laughed a little awkwardly. Like any other man, he was susceptible to praise, but praise from her, which he knew was unfairly earned, embarrassed him sorely.

“We’d better hurry, hadn’t we?” he said. “It’s latish.”

For they were walking slowly along a cobbled road with balconies of *eau-de-nil* hanging over them on either side.

“All right,” she said, quickening her pace. “But you’re a queer fellow, aren’t you?”

There came to Vernon a mighty wish that that were all that could be levelled against him.

“Did I say ‘Thank you’ for the roses?”

“I hope not,” he replied. “I would like you to regard them as a right.”

She looked up.

“A right. Why?”

“Did I say that?—well, why not? You—you look as if you ought to have roses—you look——”

A clumsy woman bumped between them, or perhaps it was nature ordering: "One step to the rear, march." They were back at the commonplace when they re-formed side by side.

A clock chimed. Clocks and dogs and clumsy pedestrians are sworn enemies of lovers—just as sunsets—moons—the smell of heather and wood fires and forests are their friends and coaxers.

"If we step out we shall just have time to meet the others at the Café Ronda," said Averil.

"Need we?" he asked. "Wouldn't it be fun to have this jaunt together? Better still, don't let's go to the bullfight. Let's——"

But she shook her head.

"It would be cowardly not to go. Besides, we'd better join them."

"Of course, if you'd rather."

"No, it isn't that—only—well, we're all together in this show, or supposed to be, and if we begin splitting up, things'll get cliquy and horrid."

"You're very public-spirited," he said sadly.

"I'm not really—but I think we ought to try and make it a general success. Really, you know, I suppose I'm the selfishest person on board."

"What absolute nonsense."

"You don't know." Her voice was unnaturally grave. He looked at her in surprise. For a while they walked briskly in silence.

"I wonder," she said at last, "what you'd think of me if you knew the real reason why I came on this voyage."

"I think I do know."

She shook her head.

"No one knows."

"If it's a secret," said Vernon, "please keep it."

"Why? I rather want to tell."

"Please don't. Most of us have a secret that's best untold. If you confided in me I should feel——"

She cut in quickly before he could finish the sentence.

“Ah, that’s where men and women are different. When men give a confidence, they expect one back.”

“And women?”

“They just give.”

Rather charmingly Vernon replied: “I suppose that’s why a man stands up when a woman comes into the room.”

“Thank you,” she said. “That was nice. You are nice, you know, and somehow I feel I owe you my confidence.”

“You owe me nothing.”

“But I do. It would have been simple enough to have refused to let me come on the cruise. It was pretty beastly the way I sneaked in, and you were awfully sporting about it.”

“Awfully selfish,” he replied.

“Ah, that’s easy to say! But you would have refused if you’d known my real motive.”

“I’m afraid you’re wrong—but I won’t contradict; it’s so terribly rude.”

“I’m going to tell you my real motive now, and you can judge for yourself.”

It being evident she had made up her mind, he shrugged his shoulders and waited in silence.

“You remember our talk that night?”

“Every word of it.”

“You spoke about my engagement, didn’t you?”

“Yes, but I wasn’t——”

“That didn’t matter. I was—was very fond of him, you know.”

“Frank Sullivan,” replied Vernon bitterly, “was rather clever at getting away with things.”

“He got away with my stupid heart all right.”

Vernon mastered the wish to ask her if the wound was still open. A glance at the deep colour of her cheeks seemed to answer the question.

“Well?” was all he said.

“I heard he had gone—on the day of your supper party. Someone told me in the afternoon.”

“Yes.”

“I had written him rather a nice letter in the morning. You see, he hadn’t told me he was going away.”

“Maybe he had reasons for going quickly,” said Vernon, “and there was no time to tell you.” Averil took no notice of the interruption.

“Quite a nice letter it was. We’d seen little enough of each other lately, but we were still engaged—at least, I thought so.”

“Then he never hinted——?”

“Not a word. He just went. I would like to have seen him before he went, but I wasn’t given the chance.”

“Wasn’t that—perhaps as well?”

“No,” said Averil, with unexpected force. “No, because I want to see him again—even now.”

Vernon smothered what he felt in silence.

“You see this ring—this platinum ring?”

He nodded—with scarcely a glance at it.

“It has ‘Faithful unto Death’ written inside.”

“Has it?” He hesitated. “Then you still believe.”

“Believe!” said Averil. “I know!”

They had arrived at the Café Ronda. A waiter hurried out to greet them.

“The party? Ah, they leave two minutes already. But there is here a motor-car if the señor——”

Vernon gave Averil a hand into a deplorably shabby old car that was shaking and coughing at the curb.

“Plaza de Toros, San Fernando,” he said, and took his place by the girl’s side. Somehow the promise seemed to have gone out of life. He could find no words to speak to her. Presently he saw she was regarding him gravely.

“I was right, wasn’t I?” she asked. “You wouldn’t have taken me if you’d known?”

He forced himself to deny this.

“Why not? After all, what affair is it of mine?”

“No—but I didn’t think you’d—well, I didn’t think men liked revengeful women.”

He repeated the word “revengeful.”

“That’s what it amounts to. Although—I don’t know—because in a way I feel justified.”

“It’s stupid of me,” he said, “but I don’t think I understand quite. You came away for forgetfulness—I gather that—but the rest——”

“Forgetfulness—no, no.”

“I beg your pardon. I should have known that of course you couldn’t forget.”

“But you haven’t seen. It was pride with me, vulgar pride, perhaps. You see, when I heard he’d gone away with that other——”

Vernon started and looked at her sharply.

“Oh, he didn’t go alone, you know.”

“Then you know that——”

“Of course, but how did you?”

“Go on,” he insisted. “What were you going to say? Go on.”

“That revengeful pride in me was wakened. He had never told me a word—or given me a hint. He just went, and I was left with the ring he gave me, inscribed ‘Faithful unto Death.’”

“Well?”

“They were going to Honolulu, he and that other——”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Someone broke a confidence to tell me so. When I knew that, a great surge of desire swept over me to go to Honolulu too, to get there at any price.”

“In heaven’s name, what for?”

“Don’t you see? I wanted to return his ring. I wanted to go across half the world just for the satisfaction of saying: ‘Here is something you forgot to collect before you went away.’”

Vernon leant back against the shabby cushions and gasped. A fierce ecstasy was driving away the gloom into which he had descended.

“Then——”

“So you see I wasn’t coming on a treasure hunt at all. It was an accident of my work brought me to your party

that night. It was another accident that the cruise was going to the South Seas. In those two accidents I seemed to see Fate giving me the chance I needed."

"Not going on the treasure hunt?" he repeated.

"No, I should have left the ship at the islands, and just done what I'd set my mind on doing, and then come back somehow."

It was hard enough to put the question:

"And that's still your intention?"

She hesitated.

"Partly—I don't know."

"But I don't understand," he said. "It's all so crazy. You could have booked a return passage on an ordinary steamer for half what you are spending now."

"Yes, I know. And I don't understand that either. But it seemed to me—it's difficult to describe—as if I had to come this way, as if I must, as if there was destiny in this cruise—some sort of compulsion."

"So you've felt that too?"

"All the time. I still want to give back the ring—but it's ceased to be the end of a wish—if you know what I mean. From having been everything, it's become only a small part that every day gets less and less."

"Averil," he said, "shall we call each other by our Christian names?"

"Yes, Vernon."

"You'll see this through with the rest of us?"

"D'you know," she answered, "I believe I shall have to, because from that very first instant it's been driving every other thought out of me."

"Anger, pride, resentment?"

"All three. They were giants once, and now they're pygmies almost."

The voice of Henry Julius hailed them enthusiastically from a car in front which they had overtaken.

"Ship ahoy!" he cried. "Capital fellow, Winslowe! Was afraid you weren't going to join us."

CHAPTER XX.

INTO the dazzling sunlit arena of the San Fernando bull-ring came the passengers of the *S.Y. Mascot*. For the occasion Henry Julius was in command, Mr. Isinglass having declared that this particular form of entertainment had neither novelty nor charm for him.

“I am well aware that cruelty exists,” he said, “without being reminded of it. Do not, however, allow an old man’s prejudice to be your dissuader. There is a lot to be learned at a bull-fight—especially about oneself.” With which he shuffled off to spend the afternoon with a book in a little *patio* he knew of where the air was heavy with the scent of myrtle and orange blossom. Mary Ottery would gladly have joined him there but for the fact that Lydia had suggested her doing so.

“Why should I?” she asked with a new courage.

“You’ll never be able to stand a bull-fight with your funny grey nature.”

Mary pulled down her upper lip and her nostrils distended.

“We shall see,” was her reply.

With the characteristic talent of his race for learning foreign languages, Henry Julius had picked up quite a lot of Spanish during his few days ashore. He was competent to ask simple questions and understand simple answers. He could be absolutely relied upon in all matters concerning the paying of bills and of foreign exchange. With rare generosity he insisted on the privilege of buying tickets for everyone—an insistence that greatly astonished Joshua Morgan until he realized that the most expensive seats only cost about tenpence halfpenny in English money. As a matter of fact he was doing Henry an injustice in assuming that his charitable impulse owed its origin to this cause. Henry

could be very lavish indeed when the opportunity arose for spending money in a spectacular way. He would buy a man a stall for the opera, but he would take precious good care not to pay his guest's tube fares as well. If entrance to the bull-fight had cost ten times what it did, his note would have been first to touch the cash-desk. Their seats were the best obtainable, being in the second row and on the shady side of the ring.

Although this particular occasion was but a small affair—equivalent in interest to a scratched-up game of cricket on a village green—it had attracted a great number of people. A ceaseless avalanche of arrivals poured in through the narrow entrances and flooded the tiers of stone seats, rudely pushing each other, and edging and crushing their way into the already crowded front rows. People of every class and condition, townsmen, sailors, hatless girls with bright shawls and marvellous dark eyes, full-breasted women in funereal black, soldiers in all the infinite variety of uniforms supplied by the Spanish Government, workers from the fields and salt marshes, boatmen, big children, little children and children in arms and a whole regiment of ragged bare-footed street arabs with little mince-pie hats and cunning, angry faces. There was no pretence of order nor any machinery for maintaining discipline. Good places were gained by squabblings and thrustings. As Henry Julius remarked:

“What a providence we came early. I say, look there! I call that smart.”

His admiration was inspired by a small band of youths who, having paid the cheaper price which only privileged them to sit in the sun, were skilfully and unobtrusively sideling along the back of a circular gallery toward the more expensive shade. Having reached their objective, they split up and divided among the crowd.

Julius was highly delighted.

“First signs of a business intelligence I've seen in this country,” he said.

Presently it became apparent that the practice was a usual one. The leakage from sunlight into the shadow from

this modest beginning became general. Indeed, several hundreds of the audience dropped brazenly into the arena and poured across from one side to the other, greatly increasing the discomfort and congestion of those who had already found seats. Henry was not so enthusiastic when a leery-mouthed lout of a fellow made an unwelcome appearance in their midst and disposed himself against the rail immediately in his line of sight. In his best Spanish he invited the fellow to be off, an invitation which was wholly ignored. It was William Carpenter who cleared away this obstacle in a wholly unexpected manner.

"Are you going to move?" he asked without a vestige of his accustomed nervousness.

The young Spaniard did not even look his way. Whereupon William rose slowly from his seat, and, taking the youth by the collar of a very shabby coat and by the seat of a pair of very perforated pants, he picked him up and cast him away. And although there followed a rapid drumfire and highly expert swearing, the intruder showed no disposition to return. William must have been surprised at his own strength and daring, for when he returned to his seat he was blushing and apologetic.

"My word!" said Henry Julius, and even Lydia threw a glance at him that for once was not seasoned with contempt.

"Good for you," said Vernon. "You're a handy sort of chap to have about the place. So you chuck people about that way?"

"Never before. I don't know what made me do it, quite." Then in a lower voice: "Was it very bad manners?"

"No, you silly ass," came the hearty rejoinder, which, to William, was like receiving a present of pearls.

High above the shouting and murmuring of the audience rose the cries of hawkers of fruits, cakes, water and wine, of sweetmeats and pink bull's-eyes on little sticks. Of the latter Mary bought several to present to some children in the row behind. Tiny children they were, dressed in starched overalls and nothing else—very starched overalls—so starched

that they provided little or no protection, and it was therefore upon their own uncovered selves they sat upon the cold stone seats.

“To bring them here at all!” said Mrs. Morgan, favouring the mother of this small quartet with a soul-blistering glance.

“Well, let’s hope,” Mary wished, “they just suck those bull’s-eyes and don’t look.”

“So long as they don’t mess me up with the sticky things, I don’t care what they do,” said Lydia. She was wearing rather an attractive frock—much too attractive to be spoilt. “Children with sweets are too awful.”

“Well, if you think so, I shouldn’t say it,” said William. Heaven knows where he got the courage from. Mr. Insignglass was right—a bull-fight reveals surprising qualities in those who witness it.

Lydia made no reply; perhaps her attention had been diverted by a feeble brass band which had suddenly begun to play.

A length of dirty bunting fluttered from the president’s box, a bugle croaked, and the main doors of the arena were flung open.

It could not be said that the procession of matadors and bandarillos was an impressive one. Viewed æsthetically, it was a tawdry affair, being composed of rather grubby-looking men apparelled in cheap silks and satins and embroidered cloaks. There was neither majesty nor grace in their bearing, nor any hint of athletic quality. Indeed, a short-sighted person, or one unacquainted with the perilous work that lay before them, might have been excused for entertaining the belief that here were eight gentlemen whose business in life was not unconnected with the sale of onions.

After rather an off-hand salutation to the president, each man divested himself of his embroidered cloak, handing it to individual members of the audience as a mascot. Then, re-arming themselves with cloaks of baser quality, they went to their stations. Once more the bugle croaked and at the

note the eyes of the audience turned by common consent to focus on a single doorway, to the accompaniment of a hiss of indrawn breath.

“Now for it,” said Henry Julius, over an uplifted shoulder.

Mrs. Morgan had out her salts and was sniffing them furiously.

“I only pray,” said Mary Ottery, “that I shan’t scream.”

The door was flung back on its hinges and into the sunlit arena came the bull. Black and shiny as a silk hat, light-spirited and debonair, he entered with a rush, a toss of the head and a caper. A splendid creature seemingly all a-joy to find himself, after long hours of darkness, captivity and narrow confinement, in the dazzle of light and open spaces. Like a dog released from a chain, like a boy at the end of school, his spirits bore him along in a joyous chase which had no other meaning than gaiety and the rapture of freedom. But out of this rapture came quick irritation. He was not allowed to caper as he would, for here before him was a fellow flapping a vilely-coloured cloak and mocking him with derisive sounds. Here was something that might not be endured by a proud descendant of a proud race. The ancient Andalusian blood that coursed through his veins boiled instantly to avenge the affront. Head down he charged, the black, sharpened horns breast-high. With the force of a battering-ram he charged—and charged into nothing. The cloak fluttered beside, below and above him, while his tormentor stepped this way and that, pirouetting like a dancer, and avoiding death by the barest margin. So ran the game until at last, tired of the sport, the man insolently turned his back and strolled away to gather plaudits from the audience, while another leapt forward to engage the bull in similiar wise.

For perhaps ten minutes, punctuated with bursts of applause, this frolic pursued its course, until from behind one of the many hidey-holes in the sides of the arena came a youth bearing six long darts with paper-covered shafts,

and cruel barbed points. At the sight of him the heads of the spectators craned forward and hands gripped thighs eagerly. Even the smallest children forbore to suck at their sweetmeats. A man on a seat in front of Mary Ottery passed the back of a hand across his mouth and smacked his lips with a foretaste of the relish to come. Mary remembered it against him, and turned her head with a snort. Two from where she sat was Lydia La Rue watching with the stillness of a sphinx. Her lids were drooping and a smile had begun to curl her short, full upper lip. Mary could not understand that smile—she only knew she hated it—and hated, too, Lydia's languor and stillness and the seeming of some exquisite age-old pleasure that she could not share or comprehend. It was good to turn from it to the angry flush on the face of William Carpenter.

"They're not going to stick those damn things in the poor beast?" he said.

Vernon Winslowe was fiddling with a flask, taking it from one pocket and restoring it unopened to another. He did not know how many good marks Mary scored up to him on this account. Enormously she admired that reticence in the man, that would not allow him to rely on any other courage than his own.

Averil Chester was saying apparently to her knees:

"Beastly, beastly, beastly."

Mary took a firm grip on her umbrella and her bag, and faced the arena again.

It was an unhappy moment she chose, being the exact time that the first two darts were plunged home into the hump at the back of the bull's neck. That the fellow who did this thing was brave there could be no two opinions. He met a head-on charge, drove in his darts, and twisted out of the maw of death by a miracle of neatness. Then the crowd roared, the bull bellowed and the blood ran. The pace quickened. Came charge after charge; and at each more darts were plunged into the great black body, more yells were raised to the sky and more blood was spilled

upon the sand. And every dart that sunk into the hot, angry flesh of the bull reflected its agony in the quivering soul of Mary Ottery.

Up and down charged the bull, and round and round the wooden sides of the arena over which the arms of blood-lusting men and women hung to snatch at the darts and tear them from the bleeding flesh and stab them back again. And some spat at the creature as he passed beneath them, and lashed out with umbrellas and cursed and shook their fists at him as though he were the common enemy of mankind or the very devil himself.

“Ta—ta!” from the bugle. Another youth had rushed forward to hand a scarlet cloak to the matador and a long *espada* with a blood-red hilt.

The supreme moment was at hand. The power of its supremacy was reflected in every face.

The matador smiled, bowed, and, stepping like a tight-rope walker, approached the bull. What followed was pretty enough in its insolence and its cool disregard of danger. He teased the bull to fresh fury with his capers, until at last, dizzy and baffled and despairing, he stood with head slightly lowered as it were, contemplating a charge such as should obliterate all mankind. But the charge was never made, or rather was frustrated at its bare beginning. Coolly the matador took a sight along his sword with its blade cradled on the crook of his left arm. As the bull moved forward, out went the point to meet him. Dead centre between the mighty span of his horns—flashing for an instant over his eyes, three feet of cold steel driven hilt-up through heart and lungs. The matador had gone ere the lumbering, stricken creature reached the spot whereon he stood. What followed seemed so little after what had gone before. Like a drunken man the bull tottered on a little distance, to lean limply against the arena sides, with a lolling tongue and eyes in which were written wonder and pain and great surprise.

It happened that he chose to die immediately beneath the spot where the party from the *Mascot* were seated.

When the death-stroke was struck, the "curved archaic smile" upon Lydia's mouth reached its zenith—as though only by something so exquisitely simple and final as death could the jest be completed. A second later she had her fingers through her copper-coloured hair and was in hysterics. Reflexes were at work with a vengeance. The audience was stamping and screaming their delight, and already a team of gaily-caparisoned mules were galloping into the arena to tow out the carcass. But life was not quite extinct—there was still a thrill left in the creature's nerves, still an agony untasted, and that it might know all of suffering before spirit and flesh were divided, the man who had smacked his lips flung himself half over the low rail and, seizing the bull by the tail, drove the point of a stick at his glazing eye.

What happened was as sudden as it was unexpected.

"Devil!" said Mary Ottery, and the crook of her umbrella circled the man's craning neck and brought his body back with a jerk. Something whizzed in the air—then—crash! There were opera-glasses in Mary Ottery's bag, to say nothing of a number of silver *douros* and other odds and ends. The bag and its contents weighed at least a pound and a half. Add to a pound and a half the venom with which the blow was struck, and you shall have insensibility.

CHAPTER XXI.

IT is a wise policy to assume that you cannot come as a visitor to a foreign land and interfere with the classic and traditional enjoyment of the masses. To do so will assuredly result in unpleasant consequences. Mary Ottery, with the loftiest motives, had knocked out her man completely and thoroughly, but in so doing had overlooked the fact that eighty per cent. of the audience were in sympathy with that act of his which had offended her, and if their situation had admitted of it, would themselves have behaved in a similar manner. There is a line of cruelty in the Spanish temperament which finds one of its principal outlets in inflicting death and agony on bulls. This exists to such an extent that the mere sight of a live or unwounded example of the species appears to excite in the Spaniard a sense of personal reproach and indignation.

Fortunately, of the eighty per cent. of sympathizers but very few were aware of what she had done. Those few, however, instantly took up the cudgels on behalf of their fallen compatriot. The next item on the program was the voice of Henry Julius, crying out:

“Don't dare to touch that lady.”

His words may have been misunderstood, or his authority questioned, for a greasy hand shot out and seized Mary by the wrist. Vernon Winslowe upper-cut the owner of the greasy hand on the exact point of the jaw. Space was a little cramped as he had to lean in front of Mrs. Morgan to do it. He was, however, an accurate hitter. William Carpenter was on his feet, and had begun throwing people away again. He seemed to have a natural gift for that.

“We don't want a fight—we don't want a fight,” cried Henry Julius; but since the person to whom this remark

was addressed had produced a knife with unexpected rapidity, Henry violated his own principles and hit his assailant in the stomach just low enough for a foul to have been claimed.

“Out of this,” said Vernon.

They were lucky in being alongside one of the exits, a narrow opening leading to a short flight of wooden steps. Joshua Morgan was first to follow the advice, and, seizing his wife by the shoulders, he hustled her towards the opening. Escape, however, was not to be so easily won. A stout Spaniard, whose figure in some ways resembled Joshua's, endeavoured to force his way between the retreating pair. Joshua, whose hands were occupied manipulating Kate, had perforce to resort to other measures than the ordinary form of attack. Slewing sideways with unlooked-for nimbleness, he delivered that portion of his frame more generally employed for sitting upon into the round stomach of the Spaniard. Apart from its somewhat ridiculous aspect, the manœuvre was entirely successful. The unhappy recipient of what legitimately might be termed a rearguard action deflated and doubled up like a burst balloon, his fall for a moment blocking the way of new assailants who were hurrying into the fight. Vernon took advantage of the moment to marshal the three remaining women through the opening to the comparative safety of the stairs beyond.

“Get 'em into the car, Julius,” he shouted. “You, too, Morgan, in case there's trouble at the door. Here, Willie Carpenter! Shoulder to shoulder.”

The party disappeared and the two men closed the gap behind them.

Glancing back, Averil saw the lithe, athletic figure of Vernon Winslowe—his body thrown slightly forward and his arms shooting out straight and clean as the action of a piston-rod. Beside him stood William Carpenter, thumping great heavy blows into the half-circle of inflamed faces that bore down upon them.

Walking-sticks were the chief danger—a stick is an awkward weapon to parry with bare hands—and the ferrule

of a stick is both painful and disagreeable when thrust into the body or the face. Vernon lost a strip of flesh from his forehead in this way, and the wash of blood spilling into his eyes made fighting difficult.

"This is all right," he gasped, "but how we're to manage the get-away puzzles me."

"Dash for it. I'll hold 'em," came the answer. William Carpenter had the small matter of courtesy Vernon had shown him on the bridge of the *Mascot* to repay.

"Thanks, but—I—don't—think so."

Curious that even in the midst of a fight a man can blush at his mistakes. The problem of retreat would have to be solved in another way, and William Carpenter solved it. A baluster-rail ran down at a sharp angle beside the opening at which the fight was taking place. It looked a rickety affair. William went for it with both hands, tore it free and flung it plonk into the body of the crowd. The obstacle was inconvenient to pursuit, and while their assailants strove to disentangle themselves from its meshes, Vernon and William made a bolt for freedom.

Lying across the exit leading to the market-place was the figure of the doorkeeper just recovering from a count of ten. Blood trickled from a cut in his chin, and since Joshua Morgan never wore jewellery of any kind, it was to be supposed that here was an example of the fighting ability of Henry Julius. The fellow showed no disposition to resist them and they reached the waiting car and stumbled into it unmolested. And taking into consideration the age of the engine and the inequalities of the track, the speed of their departure from the Plaza del Toros was very creditable indeed.

It was a long while before anyone spoke. Joshua Morgan broke the silence with:

"Well, you know, that was a thing to have seen."

And:

"Heaven be praised we're out of it," said Kate. Then, with eyes of admiration for her husband: "But the way you rumped that fellow aside, Joshua!"

Henry Julius was looking lovingly at a diamond ring on the third finger of his right hand and murmuring to himself:

“Surprising—surprising.”

Everyone was saying something, even Vernon Winslowe to Averil: “No, no, it’s all right, only skin-deep.” Everyone save Mary, who sat rigid, upright, breathing through her nose and every now and again shutting her mouth like a trap.

A new woman was being born.

CHAPTER XXII.

VERNON went ashore next morning and had an interview with the British Vice-Consul. His object was to secure for Ralph Whittaker power of attorney to act on his behalf, and in this matter he was successful.

“Right,” said the consul. “I’ll fix it for you.” So Vernon signed some papers and was preparing to depart in a spirit of thankfulness when he was recalled by the words: “What was this about a fight yesterday?”

Vernon told him the story.

“It was a peach of a scrap,” he concluded with a grin. “A real peach.”

“It may have been all that and more,” came the answer. “On the other hand, I have it on good authority that some of the less successful competitors are out for your blood. I do not think I should be giving away state secrets in saying that at any moment warrants for arrest may be issued against members of your party—in particular a lady who appears to have gone to the bull-ring armed with a sand-bag. Things move slowly in this country, nevertheless I think it would be advisable to melt away as quickly as possible.”

“We are sailing at three o’clock,” said Vernon.

“Then make it one o’clock, and be on the safe side. And to avoid trouble I should return to the quay by the most circuitous route.”

Excellent advice it proved to be, since from a distance Vernon saw two heavily-moustached Spanish policemen lolling against a goods truck overlooking the flight of steps beneath which floated the gig which had brought him ashore. Their object being fairly obvious, Vernon removed himself to a distance of security, where he hired a fishing-boat to

take him back to the *Mascot*. The gig was signalled to return, which it did after some small argument with the officers of the law, an argument which resulted in one of them being obliged to test his ability as a swimmer in full uniform. It is an unfortunate characteristic of British sailors that in discussions with foreigners they fall into the habit of talking with their hands. Viewed through a pair of binoculars from the deck of the *Mascot*, it appeared that, despite their rifles and sundry small arms and accoutrements, the two officials were no match for the "crew of the captain's gig."

"We had to cut the painter, sir," as one of them subsequently explained, "but while old Jack was a-doing of it, I give the big bloke a sweet little clip in the ear 'ole."

And old Jack, not to be out of it:

"Yer see, sir, they 'ad rifles, them rozers, and furuners never can be trusted, not with firearms. I 'ad to shove off from summing, so I plants the blade of my oar in the pit o' t'other bloke's stummick and pushes 'ard. It was summing beautiful the way e' took to water. Like a duck, as you may say."

Mary Ottery, who heard it all, nodded in vigorous approval.

Vernon laughed.

"You must subdue this fighting strain," he said. "There's a warrant for your arrest waiting ashore. That fellow you bagged is still unconscious, they say."

"And I hope he stays so," said Mary grimly.

And Mr. Isinglass, perched on an adjacent skylight, chuckled to himself.

"It amuses you, sir?" said Vernon.

"Amuses, no! Pleases and delights me, yes! Ah, Winslowe, Winslowe, I told you to beware of face values." He leaned toward Vernon and beckoned him to come nearer, then, with a drop in his voice: "They have begun to stretch their limbs—these folks—to stretch their souls. Freedom, and they're tasting it." His voice fell still lower. "What shall we say to them on the day the prison doors are re-

opened and they are called upon to enter?" A sudden chill stole through Vernon, and he shivered.

"Eh, eh?" The query squeaked thin and high like the sound of a cricket.

"That day won't come," and there was a confidence in his voice.

"But who's to prevent it? You—I—Fate or what?"

"Look here——" Vernon began.

"It's a puzzle, you know—a puzzle to be solved."

"Why do you say this now?"

Mr. Isinglass made no direct reply; he chuckled again and pointed toward the shore.

"I wonder if that steam pinnace has trouble aboard," he said. "D'you see it just putting off from the shore? One never knows from what quarter trouble will come. Wise men leave as little as possible to chance." Vernon looked, then turned with a sigh of relief.

"You were meaning a Spanish prison?"

"Was I?" repeated Mr. Isinglass tantalizingly. "Was I? I wonder."

Vernon was smiling in a queer way as he mounted to the bridge.

The anchor chain clanked noisily through the guides and the *Mascot* turned her prow toward the sea.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THAT night Vernon Winslowe took counsel with himself on divers matters, such as should control his future actions. In the first place it was manifest from what he and Averil had found in the old log-book that a real excuse existed for the belief that treasure was hidden on the island, which the fact of vital words having been erased from the page was sufficient to warrant. The possibility that the words which had been obliterated dealt only with the marooning of the man Trefusis, Vernon dismissed as unlikely, since Roger Winslowe never hesitated to chronicle such doings in other parts of the book. True, the whole affair rested upon a shadowy foundation, but was it more shadowy than those upon which many similar enterprises had reposed? He asked himself whether or no he would have formed the syndicate had the present information been in his hands when first the scheme suggested itself to his imagination, and he knew he would have done so. He knew, moreover, that he would have set about it in precisely the same manner as the one he had adopted—an advertisement and a haphazard selection of persons from the answers received. In forging a lie it appeared he had forged a truth; in embarking upon a swindle he had taken steps which might lead to a fortune. Fate, accident and a girl had changed the entire complexion of the affair, and provided a moral justification for allowing the enterprise to pursue its course. The question as to whether or not the little they knew was sufficient to warrant a treasure hunt had been answered by the unanimous consent of every member of the company the night of their first meeting. Heaven knew success was a doubtful quantity, but since the rest had thought it good enough to invest their lives and fortunes and trust in the

quest, there was no excuse for Vernon himself to shrink from the risk. Nor would he. For the future his energies should be concentrated upon making success assured. Doubt, misgiving and melancholy should be cast aside, and that dull intermittent ache of conscience which even in his happiest moments had pricked him with a kind of shamefulness should be banished. He rose, with an outward breath, and stretched his arms and into his trouble-cleared thoughts marched Averil.

He knew then that he was in love with her—had been ever since those old days in the hunting-field, before ever they had spoken to one another. But his love now had taken different shape; it was fired and magnified by her presence and the occasional contact of her hand against his. From something pleasing, tame, reflective, it had developed into a passion insurgent and possessive. He longed to seek her out and tell her about it, to take her in his arms—kiss her and keep on kissing her—to say the words—to drive from her thoughts all memory of that stupid affair with Sullivan—all sense of anything but himself. He laughed at his recognition of the melancholy fact that there are no florists in mid-ocean. He became poetic and wished he might pick her a posy of stars. Even the wish she might fall into the sea and that he might rescue her raced through his mind, a whole panorama of deeds and acts and chivalries that he might perform for her sake, and each of them was impracticable save one. That one stood out with firm definition *that* could not be mistaken. All things he might be to her save her lover—all things he might say save the declaration of his love. Here was a fact admitting no argument, for love must offer love credentials and his were forged. They must be friends and no more until such a time as effort was crowned with success, and he could go to her with a full confession of the whole business. It was not altogether a joyous conclusion to the debate he had held with himself, but if it did no more, it provided him with the doubtful satisfaction of knowing that to the best of his ability he would be steering an honourable course.

A change in the weather from savage to benign had the result of turning the thoughts of the passengers from personal discomforts to considerations of wider interest. Thus the object of the cruise reverted in the conversation of everyone, and there was talk of treasure, treasure, treasure to the exclusion of other subjects. They discussed what they were going to do with their individual shares—how much it would amount to and of what it would be composed. To foster these healthy discussions Vernon produced a copy of Lethbridge's "Life of Roger Winslowe," which recounted colourfully and at length the infamous details of the old pirate's career. It became a fashion for different members of the company to read a chapter aloud after dinner at night very much after the manner of a Shakespeare reading society. In the course of this entertainment criticism was never lacking. William Carpenter was the heaviest sufferer on account of his halting delivery and an unfailing habit of reading old-fashioned long S's as F's. Thus he would read the sentence, "such doings at sea" as "fuch doings at fea," thus becoming the author of a catch phrase which was directed against him with tiresome persistence. Tremendous was the interest and excitement these readings evoked even when delivered through the medium of Mary's level lavender voice which retained its timbre in face of the most ghastly descriptions of plank walkings or bowel-ripping encounters with rival pirates. Even Nurse Banbury, who seldom left the bedside of Tommy Gates for more than a few minutes at a time, would pop in and out of the saloon to garner an earful of these delicious adventures and patter away again like a hen who has snatched a morsel from under the beaks of her greedier and luckier sisters. It appeared that old Roger Winslowe was addicted to the use of fearful language. The words he employed were innocent enough individually but assumed a terrifying quality in association with their fellows. In the heat of battle he would roar, "Blood and brine," and thus strike terror into the hearts of those who sought to board his ship. It is sad to relate that the phrase "Blood and brine" achieved a sudden

popularity among the passengers of the *Mascot*. Joshua Morgan shouted it when accused by Kate of spending too much time in the company of "that Miss La Rue"; Julius hissed it when searching beneath his bunk for a fallen collar-stud; and it was suggested that Mary Ottery said something very like "Blood and brine" when a lurch of the ship caused her to fall on a companion-way and bruise a knee. Subsequently she declared that the charge was unjust—admitting to the use of the word "brine" and hotly denying having made any reference whatsoever to blood. It was not unnatural as a result of these hair-raising adventures that premonitions of disaster, mutiny and collision with Chinese pirates should have arisen in some of the simpler minds of the ship's company. Kate Morgan, from having slept with her cabin door on the hook, now insisted that it should be shut and bolted, since without some such precaution she could not sleep without fears of a slit throat. Henry Julius looked to the mechanism of his .32 automatic and decided for the future to keep it loaded; while William Carpenter paced up and down the white decks of the *Mascot* wishing with all his soul that he was wearing a knotted kerchief about his head, a coloured sash about his middle and a slung cutlass at his side. Failing these satisfactions, he lay awake half the night reading "Treasure Island."

Life was too easy, too soft; the fear of and the desire for something to happen possessed everyone alike.

And then one night they had a thrill. Joshua Morgan was responsible, and for a man who had never even taken part in amateur theatricals he worked up the situation with no small histrionic ability. It began at the dinner table in the form of a question, the putting of which was delayed.

"Captain Winslowe, is there a safe aboard this ship?"

"A safe? No," said Vernon.

The steward returned.

"It doesn't matter," said Joshua, and made a peculiar gesture with his fork.

Some curry was introduced, consumed, and the plates carried away.

His next remark was even more significant.

“That map of the island—it’s in a secure place?”

“My bureau.”

“Under lock and key?”

“Yes.”

“Ah!” A pause, then: “Still a wooden bureau isn’t much protection against desperate men.”

Eyes were beginning to open wide on both sides of the table.

“What are you driving at?” said Vernon.

“One more question—how many men comprise the crew of this here ship?”

“Fourteen.”

“Fourteen!” He repeated the number slowly. “Fourteen, and we number six, and one of us is an ill man.”

“Here, what is all this?” Vernon demanded.

“It’s rather over two to one,” came the reply in measured tones, “but as I hear the steward returning I’ll take leave to say no more.”

Vernon looked at Averil and grinned. Lydia intercepted the grin, and sent it shimmering back. But there was a germ in the room—a germ of exquisite fear. Its workings were manifested by catches of breath and faint patches of white blotching the lower halves of faces.

“You seem to be talking awful rot,” said Vernon genially, and was signalled into silence this time with a spoon. Joshua Morgan always anticipated the arrival of a course by possessing himself of the implement to deal with it. His was a forward policy at table; his appetite brooked no delay. As a plate was deposited, so he attacked it.

But that night there were many plates which left the table untouched; excitement will always beat victuals as an article of diet. A trembling expectancy kept everyone chained until the board was cleared and talk should be free of listeners.

“Now then,” said Vernon, trying to appear serious, “what’s all this about?”

“Before I say a word,” said Joshua, “I put it to all that door should be locked.”

“What on earth for?”

It was Mr. Isinglass who overruled the objection.

“By all means,” he said, “let us lock the door. There is to me something extremely attractive about a locked door; it bestows an air of gravity on any situation.”

The door was locked—breaths were held, and Joshua Morgan cleared his throat.

“Captain Winslowe,” he said, “I wish to ask you this: How long have you been personally acquainted with various members of this crew?”

“Most of them were signed on at Southampton after I took command.”

Joshua looked round at the company as though he had scored a prodigious point.

“Then,” said he, “we’re justified in the assumption that these men for the most part are strangers and, for all we know to the contrary, may be no better than a lot of cut-throats.”

“Look here,” said Vernon hotly, “I don’t want to be rude, but talk of this kind is dangerous stuff. I congratulate myself that we have a thoroughly loyal crew—loyal to a man. There’s not a vestige of excuse of thinking otherwise.”

And from Mary Ottery:

“I quite agree with Captain Winslowe. Why, only yesterday one of them told me how to spell ‘ahoy’ when I was writing it in my diary.”

But Joshua Morgan was not to be so easily subdued.

“In the course of a long business career,” he said, “I’ve never once been associated with a deal that had as its object a financial gain without finding there was others out on the same tack. Information leaks out, and when that happens opposition steals in, and opposition isn’t over-particular what weapons it employs.”

“Ah!” from Henry Julius. “There you’re talking sense. Now I can remember——”

But he was not allowed to voice his memory, for Mr. Isinglass had leant across the table to ask:

“To the point, Mr. Morgan. Do you suggest there is likely to be a mutiny on board?”

“Taking one thing with another, yes.”

“I never heard such utter rot,” said Vernon.

Mr. Isinglass held up a finger. The affair was altogether too serious to be wiped away by a word of contempt.

“Perhaps Mr. Morgan will supply us with his reasons for this conclusion.”

“I’m about to do so. Maybe there’s some here will think ’em unconvincing, but that’s a matter for them to decide after I’ve spoken.” He drew from his pocket a folded sheet of note-paper, consulted what was written upon it, and said: “Indictment number one. At half-past four yesterday afternoon, happening to pass fo’castle, I glanced down and saw one of the seamen—a short, fat chap—sharpening a hooked knife on sole of his boot. Having completed this to his satisfaction, he runs the ball of his thumb along edge and makes some passes with knife in air.”

The effect of this news upon the ladies was prodigious. Lydia licked her lips, and Mrs. Morgan beseeched her husband to desist until such a time as the stopper of her salts should consent to come out of the bottle.

“A short, fat man,” said Vernon. “That would be Jenkins. He’s in charge of the sail locker, and he uses that knife all day long in the course of his duties.”

“Have it your own way,” said Joshua, “but I haven’t done yet. An hour later I fell into conversation with one of the deck hands. ‘So,’ says he, ‘this ’ere is a treasure hunt.’ I tries to put him off with a negative, but he shakes his head at me and looks sideways, knowing like. ‘Treasure ships is unlucky,’ he says, ‘begging pardon for speaking so free. Them as looks for treasure finds sorrow, if nothing worse.’ Aye, and then he adds, impressive like:

“‘Who seeks a treasure they’ve not got,
 Their bones in Davy’s locker rot,
 They meets disaster out at sea,
 Pestilence and mutiny,
 And learns the tale so often told,
 That there’s no health in buried gold.’”

A little gasp went up—a gasp and a shiver.

“Yes, but hang it all,” Vernon cut in, “you must know sailors are superstitious folk, and there’s nothing they like better than putting the wind up a longshoreman.”

“If you ask me,” said Joshua hotly, “that man was giving us the straight office, and it would be criminal lunacy to ignore his words. Aye, and if that isn’t proof enough of corruption on board, what do you think of this——?”

By this time the condition of nervous tension he had produced was almost painful.

“For heaven’s sake, Josh, don’t say there’s worse to come,” gasped Kate.

“You can judge for yourself. At dusk this evening I happened to overhear voices behind one of the deck-houses. Edging a bit nearer, I heard these words: ‘Ow long are we going to put up with him?’”

At this point Mary Ottery pricked up her ears.

“I didn’t catch the answer, but the next question was significant. ‘It’s a case of goin’ on indefinite or one of us tacklin’ ’im.’ Then says number two: ‘Aye, but ’oo’s going to do it? These navy chaps carry guns.’ To which number one answers. ‘There’s a risk, and nothing’s to be gained by actin’ hasty. The chap what does it must bide his time and choose a moment when he’s off guard like——’”

“Good God!” exclaimed William. “Do you m-mean the p-plot to mur-murder Winslowe?”

“May I speak?” said Mary Ottery.

But her request was swept away by a chorus of horrified exclamations and questionings from everyone else.

“Look here,” said Vernon, “I can’t make head or tail

of all this. D'you know who these men were, because if so——”

“Oh, please!” from Mary.

But once more Joshua held up the traffic of speech.

“Listen to the last thing I heard said. ‘The best time ’ud be after dinner, when ’e’s ’aving a smoke on deck and is feelin’ peaceful like. Then if one of us slips up and——’ but he drops his voice and I never heard the rest.”

“No,” cried Mary, “but I did.” And there was so much emphasis in her voice that she riveted attention upon herself. “I overheard it all, and it had nothing whatever to do with murdering Captain Winslowe.”

“If you imagine you’re a better judge——”

“I was in a deck chair quite near, and I heard every word. They were talking, and they did say what Mr. Morgan says they said, but it wasn’t about murder at all.”

“Then what was it about?” Lydia demanded.

Mary hesitated.

“It—it was about rum.”

“Rum?” Everybody repeated the word.

“Yes, rum. It seems that the boatswain, or quartermaster, or whoever’s responsible for serving out the rum, doesn’t give the men their fair share, but keeps some back for himself. Yes, and they were trying to pluck up courage to ask Captain Winslowe to do something about it.”

For an appreciable time there was silence. Then, at first slowly, but with gathering impetus, Kate Morgan began to laugh.

It is, perhaps, the prerogative of a wife to laugh at her husband. Certainly it is one she exercises with no less zeal than loving, honouring and obeying. Kate Morgan leant back in her chair while great billows of laughter shook her fat little body this way and that like a country-side tossed by an earthquake. Laughter of such a kind is infectious, especially when it follows so tense a situation as the one which had preceded it.

“Blood and brine,” squealed Henry Julius. “Never were fuch doings at fea.”

But Joshua Morgan did not join in the general gaiety. He sat with clenched hands and a face that was peony-red.

“Aye, laugh away,” he said, when at last there was room for the sound of human speech. “Maybe it was rum those fellows was discussin’, but when you all wake up to find your necks twisted, the laugh’ll be on t’other side of your faces.”

He rose and went ceremonially towards the door.

“I say,” said Vernon, intercepting him, “don’t take it so seriously. After all, no treasure hunt is complete without a mutiny—and if you’ve done nothing else you’ve given us all the sensations of a mutiny.”

“I take nothing seriously,” came the lofty rejoinder, “except the sight of my old woman shimmy-shakin’ in her chair. When I married her,” he added, “I reckoned I had taken a helpmate; ’stead of which it seems I’m tied up to one of these here table jellies you see advertised.”

The majesty of his exit was somewhat marred by the door being locked and his having to return to the table for the key.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MEDITERRANEAN! Blue days and sapphire nights. The lapping of waves, scurries of flying fish, and phosphorus in the sea, the sweet balm of desert-dried breezes, and the endless jewellery of stars. Shall not the weary find repose in you, Mediterranean? In your expanse of swaying water, gemmed with islands, margined by a hundred coloured coasts, how shall folly, anger or greediness abide?

Why is not nature in her serenest mood all-powerful to iron out the creases in the minds of men and women and leave them white and smooth? Of all masters, a perfect environment should be the greatest autocrat. It should not be possible to squabble underneath the stars, and yet the petty failures of men and women—sickness, misunderstandings, unkindnesses and false judgments—go their appointed way unhindered by nature's gentlest moods. It may be best that this is so, and that we are given an armour to protect us against over-susceptibility and remain ourselves unaltered by this or that in beauty or ugliness. We are fashioned of such excellent clay, perhaps, as to be unaffected by climate or condition. Our faults are not redressed, nor are our favours enhanced by the frame we are put into. If it were otherwise, there would be no great satisfaction in kisses given in slums—nor for that matter could men sink shafts into the sides of virgin mountains and litter them with lumps of coal. The achievement of happiness and contentment reposes on more subtle foundations than a change of scenery. Take a steam-roller over the beauty spots of the world and cover the flattened surface with asphalt, and there shall be just as many happy people afterwards. Plant the East End of London with honeysuckle and roses, and misery

will be as rife. The treasure of happiness is in ourselves, to give or take, find or lose, according to our skill or want of skill. And thus, though nature smiled upon the *Mascot*, discord and illness and distrust and doubt worked, like worms in the wood, to rot the fabric of success.

Boredom was the root of the matter—boredom which cannot be content with its own insufficiency. Almost invariably at some stage of a long cruise boredom makes an appearance, and sweeps over the entire ship's company like a pestilence.

Since the night Joshua Morgan introduced the startling phantom of mutiny, there had been a general reticence to make any further reference to treasure-hunting or its attendant risks. It would be time enough to revive those interests when they should have arrived at the island; meanwhile fear of laughter drew a veil of silence over those attractive topics, and the passengers of the *Mascot* drifted back into considerations of their own personalities and criticisms of each other. Henry Julius unloaded his automatic, and tried to persuade people into the greater danger of playing poker with him. This, after one or two disastrous experiences, they positively declined to do, and there was ill feeling on both sides. William Carpenter no longer walked the decks with piratical longings, but spent his time mooning round after Lydia, whose callous treatment of his advances became a matter for general obloquy. Lydia's stock was very low on account of "the curved archaic smile" she had worn at the bull-fight. Kate Morgan had declared a war of silence against her, and was thoroughly outraged that Joshua declined to take part in it.

"How you can speak to that young woman at all is a fair disgrace," she said.

Joshua affected innocence.

"What, Miss Ottery?"

But Kate was not to be turned aside by such transparent devices. True, she and her husband had undertaken the cruise in a spirit of belated honeymoon, but this fact did not discourage Kate from employing weapons of offence

against Joshua in the use of which marriage had provided her with skill and familiarity. By day he avoided her society, but by night he got all that was coming to him—the most scathing indictments against his morals ascending from the lower bunk, and impacting against the small of his back with the force of a mule's kick. In all of this there was much injustice and a good deal of human nature.

“The wonder is you're not ashamed of yourself,” she would say, “and it's no use lying up there pretending to be asleep.”

Sometimes Joshua persisted in this pretence, but it availed him nothing, for the arc of his body was within reach of Kate's hand, and it is not possible for a man to affect slumber while he is being subjected to assaults from the rear.

“Aye, and the way she chases that poor Captain Winslowe is fair disgusting.”

There was truth in this claim, for Vernon was never on deck for five minutes together without Lydia flitting up to his side. Here was an embarrassment he had not foreseen, and one with far-reaching and distressing consequences. Without positive rudeness it was impossible to escape her company, and Vernon had vowed to himself that so far as lay within his power he would make the cruise a success. To do this he must avoid coming into conflict with any of the passengers. It distressed him terribly, however, that he was never given the opportunity of having a quiet talk with Averil. No sooner had they exchanged a few words than Lydia was at his side, turning what might have been a delightful *à deux* into a disastrous *à trois*, which dissolved into an *à deux* again as Averil drifted away. It was always Averil who was first to go—Averil who was disappointed that the friendship between herself and Vernon which had made so valiant a beginning should have retrogressed into something negative and ordinary. He was conscious of the disappointment she felt, but it was impossible to dispel without making a declaration of his real emotions. Politeness and common courtesy is a very poor fuel wherewith to keep the fires of a love affair burning. And it was not unnatural

Averil should have wondered whether after all he did not prefer Lydia's society to her own. They were always together, and he was always civil to Lydia. If he disliked the woman, surely he would have shown it in some way or another. The inference was that he did not dislike her, or perhaps even encouraged her continual companionship.

The affair touched her pride, and Averil determined in no way to press her friendship where it was not sought. But pride is a poor consolation, and the idleness of life aboard a ship gave her ample opportunity to feel miserable. The sense that something tremendously worth having had been almost hers, and then inexplicably had vanished, hurt her to the quick.

Then one morning when she was early awake and on deck, Vernon came up and spoke to her.

"I say, is anything wrong? You look rather down and——"

"I'm perfectly all right," she replied. "One gets a bit sick of a long voyage and nothing to do."

He nodded.

"I know. It's a tedious business. By the way, did you speak of what we found in the log-book together?"

"No."

"Then I think we won't," he said. "For the present, for what it's worth we'll keep it to ourselves."

Absurd as it must seem, the thought of sharing a secret with him was pleasant to her—so pleasant that she did not bother to wonder what his reasons were. He went on:

"We don't seem to see anything of each other these days."

"You're busy," she replied, "and occupied."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, after a fashion, but one misses talks—at least, I do. This chit-chat of a ship is tedious stuff."

She looked at him.

"Captain Winslowe."

"Hallo! I thought we were to call each other by friendlier names."

"No," she said, "that's stupid. You're Captain Winslowe to everyone else."

"Yes, but still——"

"So I think I'd rather be like the rest."

"Even when we're alone?"

"We are hardly ever alone, so what's the good of that?"

He had gone farther than he meant to go.

"As you like, of course," he said.

Then quite suddenly she asked:

"Why are you different?"

"Different?"

"It's a silly question, perhaps—but I've been wondering. You have been different, you know, ever since I told you about Frank Sullivan—and that ring I wanted to return to him."

"I don't know that——"

"Not that it matters, only men and women look at things in different ways—and I wondered when you thought over what I told you—calmly, as I know you do think—whether what I meant to do seemed a very puny, rotten thing."

"Good Lord, no."

"Don't just say that. I'd much rather you said yes, if you meant yes. We seemed to be friends, and then it stopped."

"It hasn't stopped, Averil."

"Then it's been spoilt somehow—and I wonder what's spoilt it—and I wonder if it's me." She forced a little laugh. "It's so easy to go cheap in other people's esteem."

"Cheap," he repeated. "You!"

"It might be so—from your standard."

It was the word standard that got him—for she said it as though his was a standard anyone might be proud to follow. In that instant a sudden determination to tell her everything surged over him.

"Look here," he said, "look here! If you want to know the truth, here it is."

And he threw out his arm with the fingers extended.

It was the very cream of irony that the gesture he made should have pointed at Lydia La Rue—Lydia in a pink *négligé*, smiling after her morning tub, smiling and picking her way daintily towards him.

“I see,” Averil said.

“No, no,” he replied hotly.

“Then what?”

After all, had he any right to tell her the truth? The opportunity to do so had gone, and with it much of the impulse. Just because he loved this girl, had he any right to make her a confidence in a matter that affected everyone alike?

“Oh, nothing,” he said. “There is no reason.”

Friendship will not thrive upon concealment. Averil bit her lip and turned away.

“What a morning,” said Lydia as she passed by. But Averil did not seem to have heard.

Mediterranean, blue coverlet for lovers! What a failure you can be.

CHAPTER XXV.

THEY were in the Red Sea. It was terribly hot with that sticky kind of heat that makes the nerves snap.

“Shall I read some more?” said Mary Ottery.

Kate Morgan, her knitting in her lap and her eyes half closed, nodded acquiescence.

“If it isn’t troubling, dear. I do love a book with lords in it.”

Mary turned to chapter twenty-three of “The Cherished One.” She drew a breath that was half a sigh and began to read. Very stupid the words sounded to her, with all this high-life nonsense about earls who stooped to imprint kisses, and so forth—very stupid! However, Mrs. Morgan seemed to like it, and for want of more active employment Mary had fallen back into her old way of service and companionship.

With the fans going it was cooler below than on deck, but even in the card-room the sense of suffocation was almost unbearable. The frightful oppression of atmosphere had affected everyone. Joshua Morgan was blowing and bubbling by the deck-house above. Henry Julius had sworn venomously when his fourth white collar that day collapsed like melting wax.

In his cabin in the forward part of the yacht Tommy Gates was behaving like a man who was going to die, which is to say he was staring at the cabin ceiling and through it at some place beyond. Lydia La Rue had passed through the card-room while Mary was reading the last chapter. Her eyes were hot and feverish and her mouth drooped. A second later William Carpenter followed, carrying a vanity bag she had left in the saloon. There was something odd about

his expression, too. More or less, everyone was at the end of their tether.

The day before, a stoker—crazed with the heat below—had rushed on deck and thrown himself into the sea. Vernon went overboard after him, and there was a fight in the water, where the attempted suicide had to be struck into insensibility before he could be saved. The affair had done little to quiet anyone's nerves.

When the two men were hauled dripping over the side, Lydia met them.

"You might have been drowned yourself," she said, with truly wonderful eyes for Vernon.

"I might," he replied brusquely. "Not that it would have mattered."

That was all. He would not accept hero-worship.

Henry Julius explained that he never saw the fellow go in, and Joshua remarked that it would have made precious little difference if he had. Followed words! A very disjointed ship's company.

The air was charged with electricity. Even Mary was wondering how long it would be before a storm broke.

"Well, dear?" said Kate.

Mary flattened out the book and read how a certain Lady Rosita Tillington "cast herself on a couch with truly Eastern abandon and flashed her wonderful eyes at Reginald." She broke off to say: "Life's not a bit like that really."

Kate Morgan looked up surprised.

"Eh, my dear?"

"All this about languorous smiles and parted lips and breath that drugs people. Life's not like that."

"Well, dear, I never supposed it was, but reading of such doings makes for a bit of entertainment."

"All lies, this stuff," said Mary. "Foolish lies. Life's an ordinary affair we take along with us wherever we go—rather ugly, I think, with just here and there, in patches ever so far between, some—something that makes up for the ugliness—more than makes up for it. I don't know, but that's the way it strikes me. I'd better go on reading."

“If you’d rather not, dear, I’ve a skein of wool we might wind,” suggested Kate by way of a cheerful variety.

“No, I’ll go on.” She gave the book a kind of shake and read:

“‘Life with you, Rosita, would be one long dream. Sometimes as I lie awake at night, I conjure up a vision of our future. And I see roses clambering over the door of the cottage where we dwell with one another. And there are children, Rosita—our little children—with happy laughing faces. They play in the sunlight at their innocent games. I see them, too, kneeling by the little cots at night to say their prayers.’” Again she broke off.

“I don’t,” she snorted. “That’s not children—not children as I see them. There’s a better picture of children in that ugly vest you’re knitting than all this innocent games and little cots business. I don’t want children like those—but natural ones—wild, naughty, and with dirty faces from what they’ve picked up with their hands and rubbed into their cheeks. Real children who come for help sometimes and are angry if you give them the wrong help. Laughing faces and prayers! That isn’t children. It isn’t honest—isn’t ugly enough to be honest. Honesty is ugly, you know, like things that hurt.”

“Miss Ottery, what are you saying? Honesty hurting!”

“Of course it hurts. For the twelve years I was a companion, I was never honest once, and I never hurt anybody once—I only irritated them.”

“Miss Ottery!”

She swung to the book again.

“‘And, leaning forward, he gathered her in his arms and crushed his lips to hers with a kiss that was agony.’ Ah, that rings true—that’s honest. Love would hurt—must. The only prizes worth having are won by pain.” Then she threw up her head and exclaimed: “Like children.”

The book fell from her lap and she went quickly to the deck.

Kate watched her go in mild amazement, then stooped, recovered the book, and hid it beneath a cushion where

Joshua was unlikely to find it. Then she, too, went on deck to look for Joshua, who had been left too long alone—or did she go in case he was not alone?

Mary was not left long to herself, for presently Henry Julius appeared with a word about the heat of the night and a request that she should sew a button on the sleeve of his nautical jacket.

“Yes, all right,” said Mary, who always had a needle in her bag.

While she sewed, Henry favoured her with a sample of his shrewdness in the matter of a picture deal. A canvas picked up for a tenner and afterwards sold for seven thousand pounds.

“And how much of that did you give the man you bought it from?” she asked.

“He had his ten-pound note,” was the frank reply.

Mary took out her scissors and snipped off the button she had sewn.

“I don’t mind life being ugly,” she said, “but when it’s mean!”

She threw the button into the sea.

“I call that hard,” said Henry Julius. Meanwhile Kate was asking Joshua to fetch her salts.

“Do you need ’em?” he replied wearily.

And she flared up to answer:

“Very well, I’ll get them myself. You know full well how I hate them narrow passages and bumping from side to side agen them rails. M’ hips look like zebras as ’tis.”

And in the uncanny stillness of the night Vernon Winslowe, from the bridge, heard all the frets and troubles on the deck below. He heard a row between Joshua and Julius on the refusal of the former to play a hand of cards—he heard the bitter tones of Lydia when her faithful slave William brought her bag—even the coughing and harsh breathing of Tommy Gates reached his ears. All this he heard as his eyes rested on a lonely figure leaning against the prow of the yacht, and he knew that he was steering a ship of failure to a port of disillusionment. There had been no cable at Port Said from

Ralph Whittaker in answer to his letter, and since that morning in the Mediterranean he and Averil had barely exchanged a word. Then a voice behind him said: "May I come up?"

He assented, and Mr. Isinglass joined him on the bridge. By the light of the moon the old man looked like an aged satyr. His smile was exasperating.

"Well, Winslowe, what of the night?"

Vernon did not trust himself to reply.

"Anything wrong?" said Mr. Isinglass.

"What should be?"

"Satirical young man."

"No, resentful."

"What do you resent?"

"You chiefly."

"Me?"

"You're laughing at us."

For a moment a hand rested on his sleeve.

"No, no, no. I am smiling, though, that is all. Why not join me? Sailors, I heard, were jolly fellows."

Vernon turned his head sharply. Was the old man trying to bait him—to make a jest of his doubts and perplexities? But the expression on the face of Mr. Isinglass was the very soul of innocence. Vernon turned away again.

"It's a bit hot to-night," he said, "too hot to be a really jolly sailor."

"I know, and nerves get jangled in a high temperature. That's so, isn't it?"

Vernon nodded.

"By the way, I haven't congratulated you yet on your bravery of yesterday."

"Don't bother."

"A plucky rescue like that deserves praise."

"Sometimes," said Vernon slowly, "I wonder if one has any right to rescue people."

"Rubbish," said Mr. Isinglass, and repeated: "Rubbish. But that's not all I wanted to say. I start with the jam to get to the powder. I've been asking myself just lately whether you are quite doing justice to yourself—whether

a little more raffishness—more confidence—more dash—wouldn't help things along in this difficult temperature. It's only a suggestion, mind you—and a humble one."

"You mean I'm letting things down?"

"Not at all. But there's a vast difference between letting things down and cocking 'em up."

Vernon thought in silence for a while, then:

"I know what you're driving at," he said at length. "The thing's a failure—that's patent to both of us."

"No, no, no."

"Yes, a failure, and we may as well face the issue. What's the good of going on?"

"Shush, shush, shush. We've barely begun."

"Maybe, but the spirit has died out of everyone."

"It hasn't been born yet."

Vernon lifted his shoulders hopelessly.

"The tire's flat," he said, "and we're running on the rim."

"That being so, it's for you and me to blow it up again."

"What's the good! Mr. Isinglass, in spite of the fact that I honestly believe now a treasure may be found on the island, it's in my mind to chuck the whole business."

"I would not bother about that," said the old man; he had started at Vernon's words about the treasure. "I would not bother with beliefs or make-beliefs, honest or otherwise. For my own part, I *know* there is treasure there."

"You know?"

"As I know there is treasure everywhere if we are clever enough to find it. But that doesn't matter. Our duty—your duty—is toward the emergency of the present time—however out of joint it may be."

"And is."

"For you, perhaps."

"Not only for me."

"But for you in particular."

Vernon made no reply. Once more the old white hand rested on his arm.

"It is very difficult to think clearly when one is in love, is it not?" said Mr. Isinglass, addressing a star.

“Who said that I——”

“My dear boy, I’m not blind—I know well enough the cause of your depression and what fills your mind to the exclusion of all else. Let me say I have greatly admired the reticence you have shown in that matter. It’s all gone down in the book.”

“What book?”

“A strange book I keep, sometimes adding a page or two, and sometimes tearing them out. It’s like a game of beggar-my-neighbour, never knowing from moment to moment whether one will gain a few cards or lose them. Great fun.”

“Yes,” said Vernon. “Fun for the watcher, Mr. Isinglass—the player doesn’t always have such a good time.”

“I suppose the rebuke was merited, but, after all, I am too old to be other than a referee.”

A sudden anger swelled up in Vernon and made him say:

“What good is a man who can’t referee his own battles? You came and robbed me of my own command.”

“Yes—at the command of someone greater than either or any of us.”

“You forced your way in—uninvited.”

Mr. Isinglass seemed to grow bigger in the moonlight, and a strange fervour filled his voice.

“It is only those invitations I do *not* receive I hasten to accept. This is not the first time I have been a nuisance.”

“You make it a habit?”

“A habit of mind.”

“You were not wanted.”

“Had that been so, I should not be here. It is my greatest ambition not to be wanted, but never have I felt more welcome than when I entered the room on that memorable night, and found a man mutilating an inspiration. I did not know what I should find, but I felt at work in the air around me the forces of doubt, misgiving and disappointment. And so I knew how welcome my arrival must be, and knew I had already arrived even before I turned the handle of the door.”

Away to the left the faint grey silhouette of a mountain

arose out of the dull rust of the desert shore. Mr. Isinglass pointed.

“Mount Sinai,” he said. “It was there the Ten Commandments were written. Sometimes I think an eleventh should have been added: ‘Thou shalt not inspire with promises that are not fulfilled.’ ”

His body went small again, and he passed a hand across his forehead, which was glistening with beads of sweat.

“It’s hot to-night—very, very hot. What have I been saying, I wonder? In this temperature one loses the thread of things.”

Vernon stared at him perplexed. The tangible heat of the brassy night was like a band about his head.

“You talk,” he said, “and I listen, and all my own judgment falls away and—God knows, I can’t tell whether you stir my conscience or numb it. Every sane impulse is shouting out in me: ‘End it now.’ ”

“It’s too late,” fluted Mr. Isinglass.

“Then answer this: Who’s in command of this show—you, or am I?”

“You,” was the answer.

“Very well, then I shall follow my own judgment, and the moment I am convinced beyond doubt that we shall fail, I shall make a clean breast of everything and put the ship about.”

“Have it your own way, Winslowe, you are in command—for until such a time as you come to regard me otherwise, I am merely a passenger. The matter rests now on judgment—sane, natural judgment—not pique—not anger—not resentment—but *judgment*.”

From the saloon below blared forth the scrapy voice of a gramophone, piercing the hot night with the roar and rattle of a ragtime tune.

“What fool started that?” cried Vernon.

He went down the steps three at a time.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LYDIA LA RUE was alone in the saloon. She was leaning against a pillar with half-closed eyes, beating time to the music with the toe of a silver shoe.

Vernon walked straight to the gramophone, lifted the needle from the record, and stopped the motor.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Tommy Gates may be asleep.”

“I forgot,” she answered, without moving.

“That’s all right. But in case he is, I thought——”

“Quite.”

“Beastly hot, isn’t it?” said Vernon, and moved towards the door.

“Are you going?”

“Back to the bridge.”

He had scarcely closed the door when the gramophone started again. He came back.

“Why——?”

“Because I want to talk to you,” she answered, “and, failing that——” Her shoulders went up expressively.

Once again Vernon stopped the gramophone.

“Well?” he asked. It was too hot to use more than a minimum of words.

Lydia thought for a moment, then came smack to the point:

“What’s the idea in avoiding me?”

“I didn’t know I——”

“Oh, rot. Sorry, I didn’t mean that, but Vernon——”

“Eh!” at the sound of his Christian name.

“I’m not going to call you Captain or Mister or whatever it is. Vernon, why can’t you be ordinary?”

“Ordinary? I should have thought——”

“Like other men, instead of keeping anyone at arm’s length.”

It was difficult. Something in her eyes argued that a light answer would precipitate the storm.

“I think,” he replied, “I am the same with you as with the rest.”

“Possibly, but you see I’m not the same as the rest.” She put her arms above her head and stretched the muscles tight. “And oh, Vernon, I’m so bored, so utterly, utterly bored!”

“I’m sorry,” he said, “but a long voyage is a tedious business, and in this awful heat——”

“Oh, not that. I’m bored by neglect. Not used to neglect.” She moved away and dropped in the cushioned seat beneath the row of sapphire port-holes. “Phew, that’s the trouble, my friend. Moods! You don’t get ’em, I expect. Yes you do, though, only yours are different. Moods are beastly things. You wouldn’t think I’d tried to cure myself of mine, would you? Well, I have—tried hard—but it’s no use, somehow. You see, I can’t laugh at myself like some people—like the lucky ones. If one can laugh, one can do anything, but without laughter—moods.”

“Why tell me all this?” he asked.

“Because you’re one of my moods——”

He shook his head.

“Oh, you won’t teach me to laugh at myself by smiling at me. Don’t think it’s a pleasure to me to tell you this. I don’t even know if I care for you or like you, but I do know I love you. I do know that.”

“I say,” said Vernon sharply, “stop saying these things, d’you mind? It’s the sort of talk that can do neither of us any good, and I think it’s rather silly to——”

But before he could finish she was on her feet and stood before him with blazing eyes.

“Silly!” she cried. “Silly to be in love—love’s silly, eh?” It was the word “love” fired a spark in Vernon.

“Look here,” he said, “for everyone’s sake let’s behave like normal beings, but——”

“Don’t you know when a woman loves you?”

“Yes. Yes—and that’s why, if we’re to talk together, I ask you to use the right words.”

“The right words?”

“Say I’m a mood—a passing fancy—or anything else like that, and it doesn’t matter; but “love” is a word that does matter—“love” is a word we have got to keep for where it belongs.”

“And when I say mine belongs to you?”

“That’s not true, and you know it isn’t true.”

He stopped with a half-pleading gesture. “I say, I say, let’s stop this. Things are difficult enough without complicating them further.”

“Difficult—what’s difficult?”

“Oh, never mind,” he said.

For a moment she watched him in silence. Then:

“I see. It’s like that. You—you’ve fallen for this Averil girl, eh? Oh, don’t be frightened, I shall say nothing against her—but it’s true, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” he answered. “Yes—it’s true.”

“Ha!” she went. “Ha!” and turned away with the back of a hand streaking across her eyes.

And, for want of something better, he said:

“I’m sorry to have made you angry.”

“Angry! So you think these are angry tears? Oh, you men! Well, you needn’t start being apologetic, because I don’t want it. I wonder, though, what it is in me you don’t like. You think I’m a rotter, perhaps! Well, I’d take a bet you’re not all saint.”

“And you’d win,” he said bitterly.

“Yes, I don’t often make mistakes—at least of this kind. Why do you suppose I came on this voyage?”

“You told us.”

“Yes, and I dare say I thought I was speaking the truth at the time. I came because I liked you.”

“That was not the reason you gave.”

She threw up her head.

“Reason—reason—reason. A fine ship’s company you’d have had if reason had been the lure.”

“I dare say.”

“We came for adventure, and all of us have our own idea of what adventure is.”

“Yes.”

“Yes. Mine hasn’t led far, has it?” She gave a short laugh. “This talk can’t have been too easy for you. Not much fun being fired at when you’ve no fancy for being the target.”

He did not dispute it.

“Well, if it’s any interest to you to know, I’d gladly have followed you to the devil.”

He laughed then.

“You seem to have got my direction right,” he said. They stood and looked away from each other for a while, then Lydia said:

“Not much point in prolonging the interview, eh?” And before he was aware of what she intended, she leaned forward and kissed him.

“Because I love you,” she said, and raced up the short companion-way into the arms of Joshua Morgan. And because he had seen what had taken place, he put out a hand to stop her.

“Miss La Rue—Miss La Rue—as a man old enough to be thy father——”

“Or the father of my children,” she retorted. “Oh, let me go, can’t you?” With a cross between a sob and a cry she thrust her way past him and disappeared at a run.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOR a long while after Lydia had gone, Vernon stayed in the saloon staring at the sticky sea through an open port. The tingling heat of the night was like the breath from a furnace shrinking and tightening every tissue in his body. After the quick *rafale* of Lydia's words the silence was oddly unreal. "I'd follow you to the devil." The sentence rang in his ears with hateful persistence. How hateful, too, had been the whole scene between them—hateful—detestable. The reserve he had shown—the remoteness—the touch of something superior in his manner—detestable! An awful situation arises when a man will not accept what a woman offers, and in refusing cannot choose but place himself upon some kind of cheap pedestal. There is no other foothold. But how wretched was this assumption of a virtue that in reality was no more than a distaste. It must ever be a situation crammed with hideous complexities where giving is one-sided. There is no possible way out that does not lead down ugly, gravelled paths. Try the alternatives. "Here is your gift returned; I do not like it." "Here is your gift; I do not want it." "I return your gift of love, being in possession of all I require from another source." What else? "Let us forget this ever took place." A fool's proposal! Time may in time achieve forgetfulness—but cold words sprinkled on a passion split into steam like water in a furnace.

What he had said about love and the quality of love—his plea for the right definition of what she offered—recurred, and he hated himself for the bruising intensity of that outburst. Who was he to say what this or that was worth or might be worth? If what she offered had been pure, shiny and most innocent, his anger, since he wanted her not, would

have totalled to the same. A priggish disregard—and he of all men to be a prig!

Which was worse, he wondered, to refuse a love for which one has no desire—or desire a love for which one may not plead?

And in the humming heat of that Red Sea night the weakness and the strength of his character were revealed. He became aware that in all his actions he was ruled by a longing never to hurt, never to inflict an injury. Here was not kindness—unless it were a kindness to himself—for in hurting others he drove the deepest wound in his own side—as a few moments before had been the case. He saw clearly that he would go to almost any length—any lie—any stretch of postponement, rather than be proved author of a pain. All his decency lay at the feet of this fact, and all his weakness too—tremendously his weakness. He had not the general courage to be unkind. This whole cruise was built on that foundation, as was the whole of the trust that men and women bore for him. Upon it lay his avoidance of Averil, his submission to the will of Mr. Isinglass, and all and everything. The scalpel of truth was in his hand, and he feared to use it. He was no more than an anæsthetist at whose doors was a lying brass plate bearing the word “surgeon.” Yes, and when his patients awoke and opened questioning eyes and wondered why the operation was still unperformed, he knew well enough what would happen. He would lack the courage to tell the facts, and, instead, would drowse them back to happy insensibility with a whiff of chloroform. Truth that might hurt! It was not in him.

Through the tangled skeins of these heat-inspired thoughts his mind stumbled on blindly. He had lost all track of the upright, generous impulses of his nature which so much governed the situation. He could see himself only as a weakling striving at any cost to save himself from the pain of inflicting pain. The rational side of him was at that moment non-existent. Cool judgment was gone—burnt out by the heat of the night—cloyed and clinkered by unsifted thought-ash that had been given no outlet from his brain.

He turned suddenly from the port-hole with arms stiff at his sides and his face set.

“They shall know all about me to-night,” he said. There was a hand-bell on a side table, and he rang it furiously. A steward came in.

“Ask anybody you can find to come here, please.”

“Very good, sir.”

The man went out.

From the seamen’s quarters came the faint sound of a man’s voice singing to the accompaniment of an accordion:

“I used to cry for the silvery moon,
I used to sigh for the silvery moon.”

The sound came in waves, rising above the pulse and drone of the engines. The words were strangely coincident with his thoughts. He raised his head to listen as the notes rose and fell—distinct and indistinct—merging with the noises of the ship.

Then the door burst open, and Tommy Gates stumbled in. Tommy was the last person on earth Vernon expected to see at that moment. The boy was in pyjamas, his hair was disordered, his face was the colour of lead, and in his eyes a ghastly fear of some unknown thing was written plain. Gasping for breath, he tottered forward, seized the edge of the table, and collapsed like a broken box in one of the swivel chairs.

In an instant Vernon was beside him, an arm about his shoulders.

“Tommy—Tommy, old man—Tommy, for God’s sake, what’s wrong?”

But there was no coherent answer. The fight for breath continued, punctuated by small, frightened cries like those of a child who has met a terror in the woods.

A patter of feet, and Mary Ottery ran in, followed by Averil and Mrs. Morgan.

“Gracious, what’s the matter?” exclaimed Kate.

“He was asleep,” gasped Mary. “My cabin is next to

his. I promised to listen so as to give Nurse Banbury a chance to rest. Whatever shall I say to her?"

Then Tommy, gripping the chair-arms and staring out before him with ghosts in his eyes:

"Hang on to me—hang on! Oh, God, I'm afraid. A dream—a beast—a hell of a dream."

He covered his eyes and rocked to and fro. The second door of the saloon flew open, and Olive Banbury came in. At a single glance she took in the situation.

"I knew what it would be," she rapped out. "Shut that port. Turn off that fan. Get a blanket, someone."

She was in command, and the women went in all directions to obey her.

"Give me a hand, somebody—a hand," wailed Tommy.

"Here, old man," said Vernon.

But Olive swept him aside. There was to be no poaching on her professional preserves. She went down on her knees beside the poor scared boy and gripped his hands like a vice.

"Quite enough of this," she ordered. "Stop it, Tommy, do you hear? Stop it."

But the terror was too deep to be willed out of him by a stronger personality. He jerked his head this way and that. The words he spoke were broken and hysterical.

"It was horrible—horrible—all liars they were, every one of them—a crew of jeering liars. No island—no treasure—only lies—lies."

"Brandy," said Olive. The word rang like the note of a fire-bell.

There was an unopened bottle of brandy in a locker a few feet away. Vernon went for it, nearly colliding with Mr. Isinglass and Joshua Morgan en route. He did not wait to find a corkscrew, but smashed the neck of the bottle against the table edge and tipped some of the spirit into a glass.

"Here!"

Olive did not release her grip on Tommy until he had swallowed every drop.

"Come on now with that blanket," she said. "Shift him

over here to these cushions. That's better—much better, isn't it? Now, Tommy, take it easy. You're a fine one! A lot of fuss about nothing—you and your dreams. Goodness me! There you are! Comfortable? That's the way."

Slowly but perceptibly the gasping and terror died. Then, after a few moments, Tommy turned his head and looked at Vernon.

"Winslowe," he muttered in a voice that was barely audible, "want—to—ask—you—something."

Vernon felt what was coming.

"Go ahead," said he.

Tommy propped himself on an elbow.

"This—adventure of ours—my last shot in life—this—wonderful—treasure hunt—and being part of a Stevenson book—it's—it's a real show, isn't it? No, wait a bit. I'm almost played out—just hanging on by a thread." He stopped, drew breath, and concentrated as though he were winding up the main spring of his poor, worn-out machinery for its last run. "That thread hurts damnably—sorry, everyone, but it hurts damnably. And if—if all this show is, as it seemed in my dream, a lie—a fake—I'd snap the thread here and now—snap it, see?—break the thing—chuck myself overboard to-night." Again he stopped. The silence that followed was terrible. One could hear the ship's clock ticking. "So I ask you, Winslowe, man to man, and to give me your word one way or the other. If—if it's a fair show, I'll take a grip on myself. Yes, and I'll beat this death business—I'll beat it yet. So speak up—out with it—you can't lie to a chap who's dying."

"No," Vernon repeated. "I can't lie to a chap who's dying." His muscles tightened, and his brows came down in a straight, black line across his eyes. "I can't do that, Tommy, and yet——"

No one but Mr. Isinglass understood the full depth of agony that the choice of answer must inspire—or the full measure of responsibility imposed in making that choice. For just as surely as a lie blisters, so may a truth destroy. In this grim game of life we play, there are no simple rights

and wrongs that we can paste upon the windows of our souls to point the true direction. There is no course by land or sea that does not turn a thousand corners and round a hundred capes. So it was Mr. Isinglass who stepped up to Vernon's side, and fastened his fingers on Vernon's arm. And through those thrilling fingers flashed a message that plainly read: "Lie on—time is not ripe for truth—lie on." And the power and the mercy and the kindness of a lie that was torture to utter took Vernon by the throat and forced the words:

"Rot, Tommy! Would I have dragged you all into this business—would Mr. Isinglass have lent us his yacht if it were a fraud? There is an island—there must be a treasure. There must—must."

"Honest to God?"

Once again the fingers closed on Vernon's arm.

"Honest to God," he repeated. "I believe so."

The tenseness and the fear died out of Tommy's face. His head drooped forward to loll against Olive Banbury's breast. No one stirred, and very soon an even to and fro of breathing said that Tommy was asleep.

From a distance came the sound of the sailor's voice again.

"I used to cry for the silvery moon."

"Sh!" whispered Olive Banbury, and nodded in the direction of the sound.

"What?" said Vernon dully. "Oh, yes."

As he turned to the companion-way he met Mr. Isinglass. And Mr. Isinglass smiled at him like a man who was giving away medals.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SOMETIMES a man is cured of his diseases by the skill of doctors—by the kindness of nurses—by a sudden ease of mind—by a shock—or by the subtle dominance of self-will. Should it be by the latter, then, if he shall believe in himself sufficiently and cause others to do likewise, he may acquire a comfortable income by combining faith-healing, Christianity and a consulting-room in Bond Street.

Asthma, with its attendant miseries, is ever a perplexing ailment, for which there would seem to be no standard form of cure. Tommy Gates had got it badly—and had got all the side shows as well—particularly the left side show of a troubled heart. He was, so to speak, fit to die, but with death's door ajar at his bedside he thought fit to put forth an unsocked foot and close it with a slam, so vigorous and resonant that its vibrations brought him on deck to be a convalescent in a deck-chair, and a delight and amusement to his friends.

This recovery may have been brought about by climatic change, by Vernon's assurance on that terrible night when he nearly died, or by a chance remark of Henry Julius to the effect that he had always been given to understand that a body dropped over the side into the Persian Gulf never reached the bottom, but provided an agreeable change of diet for the sharks.

Tommy Gates did not greatly want to offer himself as a gratuity to a shark's larder, and he said so emphatically.

"If I've got to die," he said, "I'll die ashore, or at any rate I'll die near enough inshore to cheat those darned sharks of a free meal."

With this determination he proceeded to get well so rapidly

that Olive Banbury found herself bereft of any other occupation but that of common friendship.

Tommy's mysterious recovery was so complete that when some ten days later the *Mascot* dropped anchor behind the breakwater at Colombo, he barraged everyone within ear-shot with unrefusable demands to be allowed to go ashore.

"I'm going to the Gaul Face," he said. "I'm going in a rickshaw. I'm going to see cows pull hansom-cabs made of rushes if I die for it."

And since a man who has been ill has a distinct advantage over persons in robust health, permission, albeit reluctantly, was granted. Tommy went ashore in company with Olive Banbury. He hired two rickshaws, he consumed a long program of iced drinks, and enjoyed himself exuberantly.

Nor was he the only one to enjoy himself, for the spirits of the entire ship's company had risen in ratio to Tommy's surprising recovery. Everyone went ashore, and they ate a great many curried prawns and peculiar Eastern dishes, and they gasped at the huge scarlet flowers that look like bits of a letter-box blown into trees, green as the heart of a lettuce, and they bought a great many moonstones and collar-boxes, and bits of embroidered silk imported from Bokhara and Kurdistan and Manchester, and they conducted themselves in a manner highly advantageous to the revenue department and general trade conditions of Ceylon.

It was a marvellous day marked by many astonishing incidents. Mary had her first cocktail and felt all the better for it, and Lydia refused to have any cocktails at all and felt all the better for that. Kate Morgan nursed a brown baby two days old whose little stomach was so distended that she feared it must have swallowed an air ball. Joshua Morgan met a man he knew in Bradford. Henry Julius saw several "Colour Combinations" which he had never dreamed existed, and William Carpenter, who, heedless of protest, had dragged off Lydia to witness some native wrestling, accepted an open challenge and, by sheer beef and grit, confounded the art and science of the professor and laid him upon his back amid loud plaudits from the assembled multitude.

A marvellous day! Fellowship and good feeling ran high. The essence of the East had entered into and taken possession of everyone. And, marvel of marvels, Averil had come to Vernon with the suggestion that they should spend the day together.

So off they went on their own—not intentionally on their own, because the pilgrimage to Mount Lavinia had started as a trio. They had, however, scarcely reached the cab-rank and chosen the little canopied vehicle which should carry them, when Mr. Isinglass, who was making the third corner of the triangle, suddenly remembered that he wanted to spend the day alone—or rather in the company of a certain native goldsmith with whom he claimed acquaintance. The old man, indeed, got quite excited about the necessity of passing his time in this fashion. He shook his head violently at the polite opposition that was forthcoming, and, sticking a bread pill on one of the buttons of the cab's upholstery, he ambled off under the shade of a holland umbrella with a green lining.

So Vernon and Averil, left to their own devices, drove along that astonishing Mount Lavinia road, with its high screen of bowing palms, its native huts, and the shops of potters and weavers, and the ever-changing escort of tiny, naked children who raced beside the vehicle crying out "Mamma ver' good, Papa ver' bad—give penny," or singing a quaint, breast and elbow-rapping version of the once popular ditty, "Yip-i-addy-i-ay."

They had little need to talk, for the Mount Lavinia road is one of the best conversationalists in the world, being ever ready with a change of subject or a quick glimpse of something new. It is a shady avenue charged with pleasant thoughts and pictures that are strange as dreams. It talks away in terms of shadow and of light and the hundred moods of colour; it entertains with peep-shows of the sea and the unfamiliar ways of native life. Silence it inspires, and admiration and delight, and sometimes laughter too. There is no end to the resources of the Mount Lavinia road. That great producer whose name is Orient has flung all the wealth

of his genius and ideas into the making of this road. And the result is the happiest chaos of tiny dwellings and busy temples daubed with splashes of bright paint—of queerly clothed and unclothed men and women—of lush, green gardens, cross-hatched with fronds of palm and blazing with fruits and flowers. He has turned nature into a circus complete to the smallest item. There are elephants and monkeys, and yoked oxen and yellow dogs and snakes and mongooses, and bananas and coco-nuts, and heaven knows what else besides.

So Averil, who had never seen the like before, and Vernon, who liked it none the less for knowing it already, sat in glowing admiration and adored everything they saw, and perhaps each other into the bargain.

At last Vernon said:

“What made you suggest we should spend the day together?”

“Why? Would you rather we didn’t?”

“I won’t waste time answering that. You know there is no one that I’d rather——”

“Then perhaps that was the reason—that and a feeling that you deserve a holiday.”

“Do I?”

She nodded.

“Yes. Besides”——there was a moment of hesitation——
“Mr. Isinglass ticked me off about you.”

“Ticked you off?”

“Well, talked to me—or I talked to him—anyway, we talked—although I did most of the listening. Do you mind having been talked about?”

His reply was honest.

“No man does.” Then curiosity prompted——“But he can’t help wondering——”

“What was said? I’ll tell you if you like.”

“If *you* like.”

“Well, it was—well, I could see you were miserable and harassed and a bit overcrowded with responsibilities—at least,

I thought you were, so I asked Mr. Isinglass what he thought.”

“H'm!”

“His reply was so quaint. He said: ‘My dear, when a man builds a sand castle he’s sure to be troubled as to whether he will get it done before the tide comes in.’ I suppose it is a sand castle.”

Vernon nodded.

“Then he went on to say: ‘Most folks stand around doing nothing and prophesying failure for the builder, which, to say the least, is a bit dispiriting. But the real friend is the one who hops along, without a lot of questioning and advice, and dips a spade and heartens the fellow with a bit of cheery companionship.’ ”

“I wonder what he was driving at,” said Vernon.

“I don’t know,” said Averil, “but something like this, perhaps. He told me, too, that most people waste their friendship in adjustment. That’s true, anyway, for heaps of hours that might be happy are spent puzzling about things.”

“I know,” said Vernon. Then: “Let’s not waste a minute of to-day puzzling about things, Averil. You’re a brick to offer me this holiday. Let’s spend it like kids and forget that there’s anything difficult in the world.”

“Right oh. We’ll make a compact, shall we? that we won’t allow anything at all to interfere with our being completely and utterly happy in this utterly and completely lovely place.”

“That’s a bet,” he answered, “but it ought to be easy without a compact.”

“Yes; but we’ll have one just the same. After all, one never knows what’s going to turn up.”

“State the terms,” he replied gravely, “and I’ll comply with ’em.”

“That to-day and for all to-day we’ll be youngsters, without a serious thought in our heads.”

“Agreed.”

“And that even if a serious thought does come sneaking in, we’ll take it by the shoulders and——”

“Kick it down the steps.”

She laughed.

“Exactly.”

“And we shake on this?”

“We shake on this.”

Their hands met dramatically.

“The word goes, pard.”

“It goes.”

That was a fine start—but perhaps finer still, though in a different way, had been a few hurried words from Lydia rustled into Vernon’s ear just before he went ashore:

“Look here, that night in the Red Sea—forget it. I like you too well to treat you as one of my moods. There’s no resentment, old chap; you came out pretty well. I was—well, never mind. Sorry and all the rest of it.”

So with that, and with Averil by his side, with the knowledge that Tommy had rounded the worst corner, with the splendid golden sun blazing down, and with the sweet smell of yesterday’s rain in his nostrils, Vernon had reason enough to be glad.

And glad he was.

“What’s it like, this Mount Lavinia Hotel?” Averil asked.

“Oh, I don’t know—kind of pagodarish, I think—with verandas and things, and a rocky garden that runs down to a beach where there are rows and rows of those outrigger boats tied up to the palms. I know one eats prawns there—which mostly feed on—well, p’raps they don’t—’tany rate, it’s a serious thought, and as such is barred expression. And I know one sits on the grass after lunch, and native wizards grow mango-trees very fast under a dirty bit of cloth and say: ‘Gali-gali’—and the surf roars at you, and it always rains at five o’clock.”

“Um! Sounds nice,” said she.

Then they talked about hunting and polo and English cottages, and West End shops and theatres, because it is the loyal habit of British subjects in attractive foreign places

to talk about the good things in their Mother Country. Out of some such instinct springs patriotism.

“Do you remember that day when you put your mare—the little roan—at that sunken road by Rance’s Farm?”

She remembered with a nod.

“Were you there?”

“Very much so. My heart dropped fourteen beats when I saw what you were up to.”

“Pff,” said Averil. “Bess could take that ditch on her head.”

“Yes,” he replied, “that was what I was expecting. You were a villain to do it.”

“Where were you at the time?”

“Not far behind with my eyes shut.”

“Why?”

“Oh, I don’t know! I’m a public-spirited sort of beggar.”

“If you’d been that, you’d have gone through the gate with the rest of the field.”

“Never occurred to me.”

“Fancy you remembering my little roan.”

His reply was disappointing.

“I took a snapshot at the meet. Dare say that helped to keep her in my mind.”

“Did you so often look at it, then?”

“It got hung up on a wall somehow.”

“A snapshot?”

“Well, an enlargement of it.”

“Oh,” said Averil, and seemed satisfied.

“I say,” she said after a little interval, “do you like me?”

“Of course I like you.”

“Did you like me before you knew me?”

“I must have done.”

“Why? Because you took that snapshot?”

It is all nonsense to say that a girl should not offer what help she can in the initial stages of friendship or courtship or affection. Our Victorian grandmothers said “No,” but they did it all the same with an “Oh, sir!” with dropped

eyes and a protective gesture of the hands. The Georgian girl has a franker method and says the words and asks the questions and throws out a hand where it is needed. Really nice men are timid creatures when their hearts are concerned. They need a lot of help if they are not to be left at the post.

“It was a jolly group,” he answered, “and I wanted to keep a record.”

Averil looked at him gravely, as a nurse might look at her charge.

“You’re a queer one, Vernon,” she said. “I haven’t begun to understand you yet. I know you like me, and I know I like you, and that’s a jolly thing to share. Does it sound frightfully immodest to say I think it’s a pity we don’t share our liking for each other more openly? I often know you want to talk to me, and yet I see you preventing yourself, just as if I should resent it if you did. I don’t feel we’re making the most of this liking of ours. That isn’t said minxishly—it’s true—and I believe in speaking the truth to people I like.” She stopped and went on: “Of course, I may be wrong, and you don’t really like me a bit, but I’m sure if that were so——”

“It isn’t so,” he said. “Most tremendously, Averil, it isn’t so. Of all the——” He broke off sharply. “But look here, I can’t go on without being serious, and that’s breaking the rules of our compact.”

“Oh, bother the old compact,” said Averil.

But secretly Vernon was grateful for it.

“One day,” he said, “I shall really talk to you, and like enough I shall say so much that you’ll never want to hear another word.”

And quite outrageously she asked:

“Which day?”

“I don’t know, but it won’t be a holiday. Hullo! here we are.”

The vehicle stopped at the door of a low-built hotel, where Averil and Vernon were taken possession of by a number of native servants who said, “Sahib” and “Huzoor” and

“Memsahib,” which to properly educated people who have read and love their Kipling is as music to the ears. And just as they were parting to wash away the dust of the Mount Lavinia road, Averil slipped her hand into Vernon’s and tightened her fingers about his.

“I think you’re a first-rater,” she said.

He was so surprised that “What?” was all he could reply.

“I deliberately tried to make you break our compact, and you stuck to it.”

“Oh, chuff!” said he.

“No, really. I was thoroughly bad and I’m well ashamed because you wanted to talk, didn’t you?”

“I always want to talk to you, Averil.”

“That’s good to hear—but it doesn’t let me out for cheating. As a penance I swear to frivol all the rest of the day.”

He accepted the news gloomily.

“Through thick and thin I’ll stick to the compact. Shan’t be a minute.”

With a wave of the hand she was gone. Vernon ordered lunch and chose a table near an open window. They were early, and there were few other guests in the dining-room. Presently Averil came in fresh and smiling. She looked as if she had had a bath and done her hair and put on a new frock—an effect that women are able to produce in about ten seconds with a face towel and a hand mirror and a speck of powder.

“I say,” she exclaimed, “what a heavenly view. Will our island be like this?”

“Not unlike, I expect.”

“We are lucky people, Vernon. Let’s talk about islands and treasure, shall we? It’s so much more real in this sort of place. Tell me again how you just found the map—you and that other boy—digging in the cellar.”

“But you know that story.”

“Um! But tell it again—excitingly—with thrills, like a serial in a daily paper. You must work up to tremendous climaxes, and then stop suddenly while you help yourself to

the next course. Then I'll say: 'Another splendid instalment to-morrow,' and off you'll go again with your mouth full."

Vernon accepted a sardine and some vegetable salad from a waiter, then cleared his throat and began.

"Here she goes, then. The Granite House was built in one of those high crags of rock which abound in North Cornwall. The back windows faced the sea, and in times of storm and stress—I say, what are we going to drink? Hock and Perrier is a sound idea."

"Go on," said Averil.

"The Atlantic breakers thundered against the rocks below and blurred our windows with flying fulmar."

"What's fulmar?"

"Don't interrupt—it's stuff that covers windows."

Averil laughed.

"Sometimes the patch of garden beneath the shale wall was white with spindrift."

"Is spindrift stuff that whitens gardens?"

He frowned at her.

"You eat your bun and listen. A wild lot were the Winslowes."

"With a yo-heave-ho," she interpolated gaily.

"Look here," said Vernon, "are you going to——"

He looked up and saw that her face had become suddenly blank and all the colour had gone from her cheeks. With a quick intake of breath she half rose from her chair and was staring over his shoulder. Vernon turned his head to follow the direction of her gaze, and as suddenly as the change had come to her came a change in him.

At the farther side of the room a tall, good-looking man in riding-suit of white drill was holding out a chair for a girl with a very pink and white complexion and a peevish mouth.

"Beastly table! Can't we get nearer a window?" she said.

The man shrugged his shoulders, but in deference to the

girl's wish threw a glance round the room. In so doing his eyes met Vernon's—shifted quickly, and met Averil's.

For a long moment none of the three actors in this silent drama moved. Then with a barely audible "Sullivan," Vernon took a step forward. But quick as was his movement, Averil's was quicker. Her hand flashed out and touched his sleeve.

"No," she said. "No, Vernon, no."

He did not even look at her as he replied:

"You don't understand, I——"

"I do understand—I understand our compact that nothing—nothing was to interfere with——"

"That man——" he began, but he did not finish.

"If I can stand it, you can," she said simply.

For a moment he fought down the impulse to spring across the floor and confront Sullivan. Everything that had happened to him—his fall from honesty to roguery, his lying, his cheating, his misery, was all accounted against Sullivan. The enemy had been delivered into his hands to destroy, and he was called upon to declare an armistice. Why? Because he had promised Averil nothing should spoil their day together. Sullivan had begun to move. He had whispered something hurriedly in the girl's ear, and they were moving away. A second more and the chance of a requital would be lost, perhaps for ever.

"Please," said Averil, and there was something in her voice that could not be denied. Vernon swung round and sat down heavily in his chair. A waiter brought soup. In the mirror opposite, Vernon saw the main doors close as Sullivan and the girl went out. After that, for a long while there was silence.

Then Averil's voice again forced to hold itself in a steady note:

"Go on telling me, please."

"What?"

"The next splendid instalment. I think the—the last one was rather fine."

He kept his word—it took some keeping—but he kept it.
“A wild lot, we Winslowes—a rough lot, who made the sea their trade.”

And, with glistening eyes, Averil said:

“Yes, go on—I like sailors best.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT the stroke of twelve midnight, Vernon Winslowe went out on business of his own. Until then he had kept faith with Averil, and neither by word nor deed had interfered with their enjoyment of the day. With the undercurrent of anger and resentment that coursed through them both, the effort at gaiety had been a poor pretence. There was a dance at the Great Oriental Hotel—better known as the G.O.H.—which with the rest of the ship's company and sundry passengers from an Australian liner they had attended. At twelve o'clock Vernon shed his garment of high spirits and melted away. Rooms had been taken ashore for the days they were to stay at Colombo, and after the ball Averil went to hers and changed into a walking-frock and presently went out into the night.

She was not very certain what she intended to do—perhaps she would just walk about—or perhaps——

The concierge had told her that Sullivan was staying at the Bristol—everyone knows everyone else's business in Colombo—there is not much else to do but gossip. Of course, he might have gone—on the other hand——

If she did meet him she would say—what would she say——?

All her thoughts that night ran into unknown quantities.

She wondered why Vernon had gone into speechless anger at the sight of Sullivan. Could it be because——?

She wondered why she admired Vernon so tremendously—wondered what it was he was keeping back from her—what secret. Wondered if he cared—wondered what he would think of a woman who set out to act as she meant to act—who would smash her own dignity on the altar of her own

pride—wondered why she wished to return the ring to Sullivan—wondered—wondered—wondered——

Vernon walked straight to the Bristol Hotel and up the reception bureau. He said:

“There was a man staying here called Sullivan. I suppose he left this afternoon. I want to know where he’s gone.”

The reception clerk, a Bengali with round specacles and a moon-like face, blinked, shook his head, and revealed the fact that the palms of his hands were paler than the backs.

“Mr. Sullivan, he not go,” said he. “He here now, Mr. Sullivan, in lounge—he smoking.”

So Vernon went to the lounge. At the first glance it appeared to be deserted, then he saw the top of a man’s head above the back of a cane arm-chair; beyond it, in perspective, shone a pair of patent leather shoes which rested on a tub containing a palm.

Vernon recognized the back of the man’s head. He walked to the chair and stood behind it, debating what he should do first. For a considerable time he stood there thinking. Then Sullivan, who had not moved, stretched himself luxuriously and said into the air with the sweetest tones imaginable:

“Going to have a drink, Winslowe?”

Vernon came round and faced him.

“I think not.” Then: “I thought you would have run, Sullivan.”

“Yes,” came the answer in an easy, comfortable tone of voice. “I thought I should myself, old soul, but the need no longer exists.”

“Discovered a bit of pluck?”

“Nothing to speak of, old fellar. I came across a bit of information which is much more useful. Take a pew, won’t you?”

“I shall take more than that before I’m through with you,” said Vernon. “Yes, and give something into the bargain. For a start I’ll bother you to ring for a chequebook.”

Sullivan shook his head.

“I shan’t do that, old fellar—it’s pointless to spend money when you needn’t.”

“Even another man’s money?”

“All money is another man’s money in some shape or form. It was queer our runnin’ into one another like this.”

“Not so queer after all. There’s still a bit of justice knocking about in this world, you know.”

Sullivan sat up and put down an empty glass.

“Ah, now you’re talkin’ sense, old fellar. Good sense. If you don’t mind my sayin’ so, you seem to have wised considerably since our last meetin’. Everything points to that conclusion.”

“I think,” said Vernon, “that everything points to this conclusion, that the sooner you pay up what’s left of the money you stole from me, the better.”

Sullivan shook his head.

“Not a penny,” said he. “Not a red cent. If I’d thought there was a dog’s chance of havin’ to do that, d’you imagine I’d be here now? My dear boy, no one has ever accused me of being a fool—as a matter of fact, I’m rather a bright young thing when you get to know me.”

“What are you driving at?”

“Just this. I spent the evenin’ with a very pleasant young fellow from the *Mascot*. One of your officers—nice chap named Rogers—nice talkative young chap, but perhaps a bit given to sayin’ too much when he’s had one over the eight.”

“Well?”

“Well, he told me about this treasure jaunt, that’s all.”

“Well?”

“Well, my dear old horse—surely—surely—surely! Young Rogers took a count of six from the brewer and spun the whole yarn. He was full of it—and full of you, too. How you contrived to cod that entire ship’s company into buyin’ stock in hidden treasure story not only fills me with amazement but with very solid admiration. You were a bad

starter, Winslowe, but once away you deserve the cup."

Vernon did not say anything for a moment; he just looked and thought and wondered what precise feature of Sullivan's face he should hit first. At last:

"I see," he said. "Then you're of opinion that the whole business is a ramp?"

"The very word I was lookin' for."

"And can you prove it?"

"Shouldn't be difficult. A hint that you were dead broke when that advertisement went into the *Times*—dead broke, old soul, and rather angry—well, I don't say it would, but it might shake folks' faith a bit."

"Perhaps you knew I was almost broke when you got me to back that bill?"

"I didn't know, but I rumbled it. Otherwise I should have returned the bill to you and gone out for a larger chunk a bit later on."

"I see," said Vernon. "You—you're a decent sort of chap, aren't you?"

"Well, old top, as I read the card, a fellar's got to live. You must have said the same thing to yourself when you planned this show. At its easiest, livin's a problem, and I do congratulate you on having found a *pro tem.* solution."

"Yes, I suppose you would," said Vernon, and his right hand closed into a fist.

With as much grace as was compatible with precaution, Sullivan slipped out of his chair on the off-side, leaving it as an obstacle between them.

"I wouldn't cut into any of the Jimmy Wilde stuff, Winslowe," he said, "honest to God, I wouldn't. A little calm judgment, old friend, 'ud serve you better all the time. A black eye to me 'ud be a poor compensation for what you'd lose in givin' it. You were always one for a bit of popularity, and from what I can see, you're gettin' a fair share on this cruise. Pity cut loose from that. Nice ship, nice company, and unless I was mistaken in my estimate at lunch to-day, just a speck of the old heart stuff thrown in."

If Sullivan had left out his last remark, it is possible he

might have escaped punishment. A careless overstepping the line was his downfall. Wit he had and shrewdness, too, but he lacked sensibility. Insensible himself to any fine feelings, he assumed that the rest of the world was like him. He was wrong about that.

Vernon twined a foot round the leg of the cane chair, kicked it sideways, and smashed a straight left into Sullivan's mouth.

And when Sullivan rose, doing unpleasant things with blood and teeth, Vernon's right crooked back to put him down again. But the second blow was never struck. His hand was imprisoned by a double grasp from behind, and Averil's voice cried out:

"No, don't—no, please—even though you did it for me."

He turned.

"You—but I——"

"Don't say anything—it was—but I wish so much you hadn't.

She dropped her head, and tugging the ring from her finger held it out to Sullivan, who was dabbing at his mouth with a crumpled handkerchief. There was not much breath in him, but he mumbled something that sounded like:

"Put up between you."

"No," said Averil. "I came here hoping to find you alone to return this. He knew about—about us—because I told him. I wouldn't have told him if I had thought he— I'm sorry. I didn't know that it—what you had done—how it would seem to another man."

She turned and looked at Vernon, and in her eyes was not only reproach but something marvellous beside. So marvellous was that look she gave him that Vernon shut it out with a sleeve across his forehead, and, swinging round, said to Sullivan:

"Go on, tell her—here's the chance you want—tell her. Tell her the truth, man, for it is the truth, how I cheated everyone with lies of a hidden treasure. Go on, I order you to tell her now."

The expression died out of Averil's face.

“Then it wasn’t for——”

“No—oh, in a way it was for you—but no. I came here because he robbed me.”

Then Sullivan, cutting in:

“It’s a lie—he’s lying—I never robbed him—it was just a loan—a loan he wanted back. Good Lord! He was nasty about it, so I twitted him on this treasure hunt. Winslowe’s all right—wouldn’t do a shabby thing—straight as a die.” Then a tremendous glance that read: “For God’s sake, do you want to ruin the pair of us?”

Averil stood very still for a minute, then she said:

“Both cheats.”

“Both cheats,” Vernon repeated.

“I see, and the price of his silence is the loan?”

“Five thousand.”

She thought in silence—standing between the two men, silently thinking bit by bit, from the beginning of the adventure—then forward until her thoughts were back in the room again. At last:

“I should pay,” she said.

She left them then without another word. Sullivan picked up the ring and dropped it in his pocket. He was still fumbling at his mouth with the other hand.

“Well,” he mumbled, “d’you accept the verdict?”

For a moment Vernon made no reply. He jerked back his head and laughed. It was horrible laughter—cracked and mirthless. It ended abruptly, then he looked up and said:

“No choice—no choice. I’ll buy your dirty silence, Sullivan. But there is a treasure on the island—there is—though I didn’t know it until too late.”

He turned and stumbled out like a drunken man.

Frank Sullivan watched him go with a strange expression on his battered face. He appeared to have forgotten the injuries he had received. They had faded into insignificance beside a new thought.

CHAPTER XXX.

SHE did not go to bed. There was a balcony to her room, and, leaning against the rail, Averil looked out across the grey sea, spangled with coloured reflections of the riding lights of ships. The faint roar of surf breaking against the mole came to her ears mingled with the thin drone of mosquitoes and notes of a temple bell. From the far-away bazaar rose and fell the even beating of tom-toms, and the wail of a woman whose man was dead.

But Averil was unconscious of these sounds except to be vaguely aware that together they formed a symphony of sadness which dulled the senses like warmth or swiftly-running water.

Very alone she felt—very lost—very much without an object. Much that is fine in imagination fades with performance into nothingness. That piece of pride—the return of the ring—how insignificant it seemed now it was accomplished. It had passed unnoticed, a trivial and neglected side show, overwhelmed by the crisis of a greater occasion. With all her soul she wished she had never done it, had never accepted that chance opening which had made its doing possible. To have been part of a vulgar brawl, to have allowed a primal instinct of her nature to exult in the belief that the brawl had been inspired out of respect, out of love for her by another man, to have shown him the exultation she felt, and then to have found—— That was the bitterest part of all—to have revealed, even though in words she had protested, to have revealed to Vernon the pride, the admiration, the gratitude she felt for a man who would fight for her and then to learn that the fight had been for the vulgar cause of money—not of chivalry—a rough-and-tumble between a blackmailer and a cheat in which her presence was the least important factor.

A cheat, self-confessed, and he was the man whose presence had driven from her mind all the smallest sense that there were other men in the world as well as he. A rogue, a swindler, a pirate—one of the pirate breed that had taken to the old sea roads again, choosing for his victims simplicity and faith and trust and even love itself.

Averil straightened her body and held out her arms.

“For I did love him,” she said. “I did—I did.”

And as if in answer to her cry came a sharp knock at the door. Averil stepped back into the room with:

“Who’s there?”

“It’s I.” The reply was in Vernon’s voice.

“What do you want?”

“To speak to you. Can you come down to the garden?”

She thought. It was maddening that the sound of his voice should still stir her.

“You may come in,” she said.

He turned the handle and entered. His face was very white and set, but he seemed oddly composed.

“I offer no apology for coming here,” he said. “The position demands that I should know what you mean to do.”

Averil turned on a light by the dressing-table. Her voice shook when she replied:

“You mean do I intend to give you away?”

“Put it like that if you wish.”

“I—I haven’t decided yet.”

“Then with your permission I’ll wait until you do.”

She flared up at that.

“I give no permission,” and she made a half-gesture toward the door.

“I’m sorry,” said Vernon, “but I can’t go. By an accident no one could have foreseen, you have tumbled on the truth about this treasure hunt. I want to find out what action you mean to take.”

“And to find out,” she said, “you come to my room at two in the morning, knowing it’s impossible for me to ring and have you turned out.”

“That’s unfair. I asked you to come down to the garden.

But rather than——” He left the sentence unfinished and turned toward the door.

“Wait, what is it you want?”

“You mean I may wait?”

“Yes, what’s it matter?”

“I’ll be as quick as I can. You found out the truth—what action shall you take in regard to the rest?”

Averil rubbed the palm of a hand against her forehead.

“Tell them, I suppose.”

“I see.”

“I should have thought it was obvious I must do so.”

“Not quite,” he replied. “You have just found out and you want to tell. I found out what a low swindle it was on the night I floated the scheme.”

“What do you mean?”

“Found out how much I hated myself.”

“And yet you let it go on.”

“Yes. That’s what I ask you to remember.”

“Because you had something to gain?”

“Had I?” he answered wearily. “Oh, well, let it go at that. But I haven’t finished yet.”

“Well?”

“I was not the only one who found out that night.”

“Who else?”

“Mr. Isinglass.”

She repeated the name incredulously.

“But he—but why——?”

“And he, too, allowed it to go on.”

Averil moved her head from side to side.

“Do you ask me to believe he had something to gain, too?”

“Yes.”

“You are in partnership?”

“You may call it a partnership.”

“I don’t understand—it’s horrible. What did you—what do you mean to do with us?”

“Make amends,” he said.

“Make amends?”

He nodded.

“Just that. Turn a lie into a truth. Here is an enterprise which, even though it began as a fraud, may develop into an honest and even a splendid achievement. Here are a number of simple, trusting people who, without question, have delivered their empty lives into my hands and expect me to fill them in several ways.”

“But—but it’s all wrong—how can you? It’s impossible!”

“Nothing is impossible until it’s proved so. A hundred times a day I have said to myself it can’t be done and a hundred times a day I seem to hear an answer: ‘It may be done.’ ”

“How?”

“Let’s look at our gains so far. A little, timid woman who day by day develops in strength and courage—Mary Ottery. Tommy, a dying boy, who——”

“You lied to,” said Averil, with a flash of memory.

“Yes. I saved his life with that lie. William Carpenter——”

“Oh, I know,” she said, “I know—but what’s the use, what’s the use when we are certain what the end must be——?”

“Even if the end results in no more than the gains already made, isn’t it enough? Doesn’t it justify our going on?”

“But when the truth comes out—when they know that from first to last—the cynicism of it all.”

“Will the cynicism be any the less if we end it now?”

She covered her eyes and rocked silently.

“I don’t want to influence you one way or the other, but those are the facts. It’s for you to decide what to do.”

“Then there’s Frank Sullivan,” she said suddenly.

“He’ll say nothing. It would cost him too much.”

Again a silence.

“If I spoke—it would mean you—they’d put you in prison.”

“That hardly matters,” he said.

“There is an island?”

“Yes.”

“But the treasure?”

“I forged the words about the treasure from that book.”

She started.

“Then what we found out that day at Cadiz——”

“Is the one practical reason for hoping.”

“That was why you were so——”

“Yes. But I wouldn't pin too much faith to our discovery. It may—and probably will—lead nowhere. The decision turns on the personal element—no other!”

A faint lemon light had shown in the east. Dawn was breaking. Averil got up and went out on the balcony. Vernon did not move.

After a long while she said:

“Very well, I won't speak.”

She turned, expecting to see gladness in his face, but instead it was grey and lined with misery.

“You should be glad. I don't understand.”

“Yes,” he murmured dully, “I should be glad, I suppose; but if you knew—if you knew how much easier it would have been if you had decided the other way. You are right, though—we must go through with it.”

“We?”

“All of us.”

“But I—I'm not going through with it.”

“What?”

“My part ends with to-night. It's ended differently to what I expected, that's all——”

He seemed rather dazed.

“Oh—the ring—yes, yes, I forgot.” His brain cleared sharply. “Then what are you going to do?”

“I've still a little money—I shall return to England on the next boat. To-morrow I'll say good-bye to everyone and wish them good luck.”

“Wait a bit,” said Vernon. “Wait a bit. If you go it'll destroy everything—everything—we shall never be able to explain. Doubt will come in and distrust—everyone will imagine——”

“Not if I tell them the facts and the reasons why I came.”

“No, perhaps—oh, yes, it would—it would. If one goes—all go.” And then suddenly, at the end of his tether: “God! If you did that, I should never have the human strength to——”

And she broke out with: “What difference—what difference can it make to you?”

With every ounce of his will-power Vernon suppressed a torrent of words.

“Have it your own way,” he said. “Go, if you must. I’ll manage somehow. God knows you’ve reason enough.” He sat down brokenly on the bed and took his head in his hands.

And:

“Vernon,” Averil cried, “Vernon, I won’t go. Oh, my dear, I won’t leave you, I won’t leave you.”

And her arms went round his neck and her cheek was crushed against his.

And all the mother in her and the lover in her and the adorable, unquenchable woman in her went out to him in that embrace.

He did not move—dared not—he remained utterly still while that great surge of forgetfulness, sympathy and kindness flowed through him. Then very gently he untwined her arms and moved toward the door, where he turned.

“Averil,” he said, “I shall believe you would have done that to a stranger child who had been hurt somehow. No, don’t interrupt me—it’s difficult—to-morrow, I think, you may be glad to tell yourself the same thing. Just a great, kind impulse it was—something to be very proud of and never to regret.” He stopped, fumbling for words. “We only regret a kindness like that when the subject’s unworthy—or reads another meaning. I’ve just this to say: It’s splendid of you to promise to come on with us—and—and—I want you to know that—that I shall never bother you in any way—never.”

Then he went out, silently closing the door.

But Averil was scarcely conscious of the words he had spoken. She only knew that she had put her arms round the neck of a swindler and pressed her cheek to his. This she knew, and she was glad. A rogue, a vagabond, a murderer he might be—still she was glad—gloriously—gloriously glad.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AKBAH RANA KHAN removed some exquisite pieces of goldwork from a stool of carved ebony and besought Mr. Isinglass to be seated.

“The boy Mohammed,” said he, “hath already told me that the protector deigned to visit my poor shop yesterday morning.”

“I did, and you were out.”

“Alas! that the burial of a most wretched cousin should have robbed me of so high an honour.”

“Rubbish,” was the practical rejoinder. “I’ve a lot to talk about, and we won’t waste time paying compliments.”

“The protector’s years are many, and with each year his wisdom increases.”

“Nice of you to say so, but let’s get to business. They tell me, Rana Khan, you are the finest goldsmith in the East.”

The old craftsman made a deprecatory gesture.

“I have some small skill in the working of metals, but what is my poor skill compared with——”

“Never mind about comparisons.”

“As my lord wills. I was about to name one who is dead these two thousand years——”

“Well, as he’s out of the running,” said Mr. Isinglass, “we’ll leave him to rest in peace. Now, Rana Khan, take a look at these.”

So saying, he poured a few coins from a wash-leather bag into the old craftsman’s open palm. For a few moments Rana Khan fingered and considered them in silence. At length:

“Does my lord wish me to say what coins these be?”

“You recognize them?”

“Assuredly. Here is a piece of Chinese gold—an early

piece—minted over three centuries ago. These be of Spanish origin—a doubloon is the name of this—while the other—but its name defeats my poor power of speech—besides, I have forgotten.”

“A gold moidore,” said Mr. Isinglass.

Akbah Rana Khan looked up in admiration.

“In truth my lord knows all things. Strange is it indeed that he seeks enlightenment from one so ignorant as Rana Khan.” And once again he embarked upon a recital of his client’s brilliant scholarship and amiable qualities, winding up with an inquiry as to how he could be of service.

Infected, perhaps, by this flowery method of expression, Mr. Isinglass set about to state his need in much the same fashion.

“Rana Khan, I am a rich man—a very rich man—indeed, I am so rich that I am sorely put to it to find means of distributing my wealth. While turning over this problem in my mind an agreeable thought came to me that I would like to supply myself with a large quantity of coins similar to the ones you have in your hand.”

“Were I a rich man like my lord,” came the reply, “I could conceive no worthier object than to act in similar wise.”

“Nonsense,” said Mr. Isinglass, dropping back into the commonplace. “You think I’m a fool, but let me go on. I want a lot of these coins—hundreds—thousands, in fact—and there is nowhere in the world where I can get ’em.”

“Alas!” said Rana Khan, “that aught my lord desires should be denied him.”

“I don’t intend to be denied.”

“Here is a noble obstinacy,” said Rana Khan, who was sure he was dealing with a fool. “Of such determination are empires built.”

“I don’t want to build an empire,” said Mr. Isinglass, “but I do want to fill a treasure chest, a chest about the size of that box which you are leaning against.”

Rana Khan gasped.

“There’s no need to fill it entirely with coins, you understand—indeed, I would rather not.”

“My lord sees clearly the folly of waste.”

“So I thought we might line the bottom half with bar gold and fill in an odd corner or two with a bag of jewels.”

Only with the very greatest difficulty was Rana Khan able to reply:

“In all matters, even in life itself, variety is a blessing.”

“Just so. Now the question is whether you, Rana Khan, with the skill and knowledge you possess, could fix up such a treasure chest—strike the coins and bar the gold and do all the rest of it in such a way that anyone finding it would believe beyond all doubt that they had tumbled on a hidden treasure that had been buried for a matter of three hundred years.”

A considerable time passed before Rana Khan was able to speak a word, the while he mopped his brow with a hanging corner of his sari cloth.

“Is my lord serious?”

“I am.”

“He desires his servant to furnish and to fill such a chest?”

“I do.”

“But, my lord, to do so would be to expend a prince’s ransom.”

“As to that,” replied Mr. Isinglass, “I never quite know how much a prince’s ransom is, but I am prepared to go to——”

He named a very large sum of money. Rana Khan blinked incredulously.

“And my lord offers this work to me?”

“On the proviso that you say nothing about it to a soul and get it done in record time.”

Rana Khan nodded.

“With me,” he said, “silence is a second part of nature. For that reason I have espoused myself to the goldsmith’s craft and never taken a wife. I know of such a chest as the one my lord desires, an iron chest, brass-bound and studded, and built in the period of which he spoke. As to making a die for the coins, there should be no great difficulty,

since here are examples from which I may work to pattern."

"I take it, then, you accept the commission?"

"I live to do so. There will be some little trouble to render upon each coin a seeming of time's corrosion, but doubtless it is a trouble care will overcome."

Mr. Isinglass leant forward and took the small brown hand in his small white hand.

"Your best work, Rana Khan," he said, "for upon your success depends the happiness of many."

It was the handshake that swept away humilities.

"My brother may rest assured."

"And how soon?"

"The need is urgent?"

"Urgent."

Rana Khan debated.

"From this hour the bolts of my doors are shut, nor shall any answer be given to whosoever may beat upon the panel."

"And how long?"

"Eight days, my lord—maybe less."

Mr. Isinglass took from a small bag he was carrying a huge pile of banknotes.

"If you need more, you know where to find me."

"I know."

At the door he turned.

"You may think I am mad, Rana Khan, but I'm not really mad. You see, I'm trying to turn a failure into a success—I'm banking everything in an effort to create a bit of permanent happiness. Perhaps that is madness. I'm not sure."

"If it be madness to seek to create something that shall endure," replied Rana Khan, fingering a piece of delicate gold filigree at which for years he had been working, "if that be madness, then is every artist a madman, my lord."

Mr. Isinglass went out into the sunlight smiling to himself and swinging his cane.

A week later, in the small hours of early morning, a crate covered with rush matting was brought aboard the *Mascot*. Mr. Isinglass superintended the operation and skilfully ar-

ranged that even the look-out was unaware of what was taking place. The crate was conveyed privately to his cabin, where, after the wrappings had been removed, it was concealed in a locker. And all the remainder of that night Mr. Isinglass rubbed his hands and rolled bread pills and chuckled to himself.

Next day the *Mascot* put out to sea again.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE voyage between Colombo and Singapore, and thence on to the last port of call in North Borneo, was happy and uneventful. Excitement ran high, however, when the white yacht steamed away from Sandakan and the last stage of their travels had begun. When next they set foot on *terra firma* it would be at the island of their dreams.

It was after midnight when Vernon came down from the bridge. In the empty saloon he stayed to mix himself a whisky and soda and smoke a cigarette before turning in. The passengers and stewards were all in bed, and, save for the familiar noises of the ship and the lapping of water along the sides, all was silent. A door behind Vernon's chair opened and closed as though it were swinging on its hinges.

"Hullo!" he said, without turning round. "Who's there?"

"It's me—or rather, it's I," said a sleek, silky voice. "Hope I don't intrude."

Vernon spun round in the swivel-chair.

"Sullivan!" he cried. "Where the blazes——"

"Don't make a noise, old top—if you start cursing now, it'll be so difficult to explain me away afterwards."

"Explain you away——"

"Certainly. It must be obvious to everyone that I'm here as the guest of my dear old friend, Vernon Winslowe."

He approached the decanter, but Vernon checked him.

"How did you get aboard?"

"Oh, that was easy stuff. Just walked aboard; nobody stopped me. But I've had a deuced hot and uncomfortable time under the canvas of that port-side long-boat. Sixteen hours, and precious little to drink."

“You came aboard at Sandakan?”

“That’s it—Sandakan, old boy—a very jolly little place, too.”

For the moment Vernon was too perplexed and stunned to seek other than explanations. He had left Sullivan, as he believed, thousands of miles away, and now like some vile apparition he had arisen out of the sea.

“You realize there’s nothing to stop me putting you in irons as a stowaway?”

Frank Sullivan possessed himself of the decanter and splashed a heavy tot of spirits into a glass.

“By gad, I needed that,” he said; then: “Nonsense, old fellow. There’s everything to stop you. Irons wouldn’t be much use unless you gagged me as well.”

“What’s your idea? Out with it!”

Sullivan dropped uninvited into a chair.

“To begin with, I resented that blow.”

“So you put yourself in the way of fresh resentments?”

Sullivan waved a hand.

“I’ll take a bet you won’t hit me again. You’re much too sensible to do that.”

With an effort Vernon checked the impulse to make him lose his bet.

“I ask what you’re here for.”

“Ain’t it obvious? Treasure, old friend. I had your word that this show is a sound one—even though you didn’t discover the fact until it was too late to save your awkward conscience. Treasure, of course. I flatter myself I can always tell when a fellow’s speaking the truth, and truth fairly radiated from your honest countenance when you cried dramatically, ‘The treasure is there.’ ”

“I see; you hope to blackmail a way into this show. Well, you’ll be unlucky. For one thing, we’re a syndicate, and if you imagine anyone’s going to favour splitting their share to oblige you, I can tell you straight they won’t.”

“Now isn’t that a pity? What do you suggest as an alternative?”

“That you get off this yacht and swim.”

“No,” said Sullivan. “No. I never tackle anything when the odds are all against me. A much better notion would be for you to divide your share with me. After all, it isn’t much to pay for preserving your reputation, is it, now? I’d just hate to have to give you away as a swindler.”

“Yes, I suppose you would.”

“Whereas, if you accept me in a spirit of resignation, I promise, old fellar, I’ll be the best friend you’ve got on board.”

“I see. That’d be nice.”

“So let’s make up our minds to shake hands and work together.”

Vernon did not reply at once. It was hot in the cabin, and he rose to switch on a fan. Incidentally the movement brought him within striking distance of Sullivan, but Sullivan made no effort to protect himself. He sat smiling and sipping his whisky, the very expression of a man who is confident of success. Meanwhile Vernon’s mind was working quickly. He saw that a false move would mean the collapse of everything.

At his next question all the indignation had gone out of his voice. He sounded instead like a man driven against his will to accept unwelcome terms. His tone was dull with impotence.

“But you’ve no kit. How can I explain your being aboard without a——”

But here was an objection Sullivan waved aside.

“My dear old boy, we’re much of a size and these tropical suits are much of a muchness. By necessity I had to travel light. I didn’t want to draw attention to my departure from Colombo, so I sent the little girl up to Neuralia with most of the luggage and said I’d follow in a day or two after I’d settled a bit of business.”

“You hadn’t talked over your plans with her?”

Sullivan shook his head.

“Talking to women is a mistake, old friend. Always avoid a scene if you can.”

“Did you leave her any money?”

“Oh, she’ll rub along all right, though, to tell the truth, I’m not over-interested. That little episode had run its course.”

Vernon nodded. Under the cover of a hand he was biting his lip hard.

“How did you know Sandakan would be our last port of call?”

“Through young Rogers. That evening he and I spent together was really helpful. He told me, too, you’d be stopping a week at Colombo. That gave me a good start. So, having brained out the scheme the day after our little chat, I booked a passage on the mail steamer to Singapore, caught the Borneo boat by the skin of my teeth, and hung around at Sandakan until you showed up. I think you’ll agree the old grey matter worked pretty well.”

“Yes—very, very well. You must have been pretty confident I shouldn’t kick.”

“Didn’t see how you could. After all, you were ready to pay five thou. for my silence, and on the face of it you’d be good for a bit more.”

“That’s logic,” said Vernon. “That’s sound. What is it the lawyers say?—if once you pay a blackmailer, you’re done for.”

“If we’re to be friends,” said Sullivan, “don’t let’s call each other rude names.”

“No—no, certainly not. I must make the best of it, mustn’t I? You’re here, and, unless I chuck you overboard, you look like remaining.”

“Sensible lad,” said Sullivan. “It’s a truce, then?”

“Looks like a truce.”

“Capital, and to-morrow morning you’ll introduce me round as your friend?”

Vernon nodded.

“After breakfast.”

“If there’s any difficulty explaining how I came aboard, might be a notion to say we had a bet and——”

“You can safely leave all that to me,” said Vernon. “I’ll

think of something. It's late now, and we'd best turn in. There's an empty cabin next to mine, if you don't mind sleeping in blankets for to-night."

Frank Sullivan rose and stretched himself luxuriously. He was a big, handsome beast, and with a terribly attractive smile. Tall, lithe, debonair and conscience-free, he was a man dangerous to men and women alike. A sudden realization of this fact set the nerves and muscles in Vernon's body snapping with antagonism. Would it not be better to end the affair here and now rather than expose the whole enterprise to the risk of this man's society? If it came to a fight, they were well matched, and the chances were even. A fight—a real fight, and no quarter! The idea was irresistibly tempting. Vernon had fought so many difficulties with his brain, and it would be a welcome change to meet this new emergency with his hands.

Then Sullivan said:

"Put it out of your head, old boy—what's the use?"

Vernon laughed, for suddenly an inspiration had come to him.

"You're quite right," he said. "No use at all. Come on, then."

He led the way to the vacant cabin.

"Well, come," said Sullivan, with admiration, "this isn't too bad at all."

And Vernon replied:

"'Tany rate, it'll do for to-night. We'll fix you up with different quarters to-morrow."

"That's the spirit. You and I'll get on first-rate. Night-night, old man!"

"Sleep well," said Vernon.

But, despite Frank Sullivan's prophecy of future bliss and accord between them, he turned the key and shot the bolts of his cabin door. He was not a man who left anything to chance.

And for long hours Vernon Winslowe sat at his writing-table thinking and staring out before him until the light of

dawn filtered its pink rays through the triple port-holes. There was not a vestige of fear or distress on his face; instead, it was illumined with a new and vital excitement.

“We’ve carried it through so far,” he said, “and, by heaven, we’ll carry it through to the finish.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THERE was a knock at Averil's door.

"Yes; who's there?" she said.

Vernon's voice replied:

"Something's happened. Dress as quickly as you can and come on deck."

"Right. Three minutes."

But she took less.

Vernon was waiting at the top of the companion-way. She was astonished to see how excited he looked.

"Well? What's up?"

"Come over here where we shan't be overheard. First, I must put you on your guard. Frank Sullivan's on board."

"Frank! But—he——"

"Yes, stowed himself away under a boat tarpaulin at Sandakan. No one knows he's here except myself." And in a few hasty words he described Sullivan's dramatic appearance of overnight.

"But what's he want?"

"To join in this treasure hunt, of course."

"He believes in it?"

"Yes; I told him that night in Colombo that I believed in it."

Averil wrinkled her forehead.

"But this is awful," she said. "No one would consent——"

"Of course they wouldn't—but he says he'd be content with half of my share."

"The beast," said Averil. "Hasn't he done enough?"

"Apparently not. Now the question is this: Am I to accept that arrangement or refuse?"

"If you refuse he'd——"

“Naturally, he intends to explode the whole business.”

“And he could?”

“He could try. Now what shall I do? Accept him or fight him?”

Averil's features were working angrily and her hands were clenched. Her reply was in the form of a question—seemingly irrelevant:

“Where's that girl that he——?”

“Jettisoned,” said Vernon. “Packed off to the hills so that he could escape.”

“The beast,” said Averil again. Then: “Poor little devil.” Suddenly she turned to Vernon with flaming cheeks. “Fight him,” she said; “we can't let a beast like that get away with it every time. Fight him. D'you think I could bear you to accept terms from such a beast?”

“Oh, you wonder, you darling!” cried Vernon. “I was praying all night you'd say that. There's a risk—a terrific risk, but with you backing me I believe I can pull it through.”

“Does that help,” she said, “me backing you?” There was a glorious light in her eyes—a light of battle—love—whatever he cared to read.

“Help?” Impulsively he seized her hands and covered them with kisses. Then:

“There! I'm a rotter—anything you like to call me—why, I can't even keep my word to you—but I couldn't help it, Averil.”

And she answered:

“Have I seemed to want you to?”

A minute later Vernon stopped at the door of Sullivan's cabin to whisper:

“Don't show up until I come and fetch you. It'll be best to spring you on the company when everyone's present.”

“Right-oh, old top! You're running this show.”

“Yes,” said Vernon, “I am.”

He was very silent throughout breakfast, and at its conclusion he asked everyone to remain seated, as he had an important announcement to make.

“But nothing important ever happens at sea, especially after breakfast,” said Henry Julius. There was a little laugh at the sally.

Vernon turned to the steward:

“Go to the cabin next to mine and ask the gentleman who is there if he will kindly come here, please.”

“What?” “Gentleman!” “Good Lord, who——”

“I’ll explain in a minute,” said Vernon.

All eyes were riveted on the doorway through which the steward had passed. Then Frank Sullivan appeared, trim, shaved and smiling.

“Allow me,” said Vernon, “to introduce an acquaintance of mine, Mr. Frank Sullivan.”

There were one or two rather halting greetings and a really hearty “Hullo, everybody!” from Sullivan himself.

Mr. Isinglass had put on his pince-nez and was looking at Vernon with a puzzled expression. There was something about him he did not understand.

“I expect,” said Vernon, “you will be wondering how this gentleman came on board. The answer is simple enough; he stowed himself away in the port side whaleboat and made his first appearance at one A.M. last night.”

“Great joke, wasn’t it?” laughed Sullivan, who had an unpleasant feeling that Vernon was making a mess of the introduction and that he could have handled it far more capably himself.

“H’m!” said Joshua Morgan. “Captain Winslowe, were you aware of his presence when we left port?”

“Not an idea,” was the airy rejoinder. “It was a complete surprise to me.”

“I say—I say,” from Frank Sullivan. “Don’t forget the bet, old boy. The bet I’d get aboard without being spotted.”

“There was no bet.”

Things were becoming interesting. Frank Sullivan had begun to frown.

“Then what’s the jolly fellar want?” asked Tommy.

“That’s easily told. He wants to join us on this cruise and have a share of any treasure we may find.”

The silence which followed was painful. It was broken by Henry Julius:

“That’s all very fine and large; but isn’t the gentleman aware the syndicate is already formed?”

“Oh, yes, he knows that.”

“Then I, for one, say what the devil——?”

“Here, here,” from Joshua Morgan. “I don’t know as I sets much store in treasure-findin’, but us have put up capital, and this here company isn’t going to issue fresh stock if I have aught to say.”

Then Frank Sullivan:

“I hadn’t dreamt of such a thing. A little private arrangement with Winslowe himself, perhaps, but that would cut into no one else’s interest.”

“Yes,” said William Carpenter, speaking for the first time, “but is Winslowe agreeable to that?”

“Of course he is.”

“On the contrary,” said Vernon slowly, “I haven’t the slightest intention of making any such arrangement.”

It was a declaration of war.

“Have you not?” said Frank Sullivan. “Have you not, old friend? Isn’t it rather a mistake to be so emphatic?”

“I don’t think so,” came the answer, and every word seemed to weigh a ton.

Joshua Morgan leant back in his chair and banged a fist down on the table.

“Seems to me there’s a mystery here as wants clearing up. We haven’t come thirteen thousand miles to be made fools of.”

“There’s no mystery,” said Vernon. “The whole affair is as clear as daylight. If you will give me your attention for a few minutes, I hope to prove that to you.”

It was perfectly clear to Frank Sullivan that the game was up so far as a profitable share in it was concerned. For some motive he could not begin to understand, this fool Winslowe preferred exposure to accepting his terms. Very good! If it was to be war, he, Sullivan, would fire the first round.

“Before he speaks,” he said, “let me tell you this man is a common swindler—and you are the simpletons he’s duped. The whole of this treasure business is a ramp devised by a man who was nearly broke to line his pockets at your expense.”

The battle had begun now with a vengeance. Averil, her hands clenched beneath the table, shot a glance round the circle of faces to mark the effect of the words.

Mr. Isinglass was polishing the lens of his pince-nez, while little stabs of light seemed to be shooting from his half-lowered eyes. Olive Banbury, who had been sitting next to Vernon, rose from her chair and passed quickly to the side of Tommy Gates. Her cheeks were crimson. The Morgans were staring at one another, speechless; while Henry Julius was switching quick glances from Sullivan to Vernon and back again, trying, as it were, to see which of the two men might be trusted. Half audibly William Carpenter was repeating over and over again: “I don’t believe it—don’t believe it.” Only Mary Ottery was calm—changeless—sitting with hands folded in her lap like a member of the congregation in a church.

Mr. Isinglass was the first to speak. He spoke in his normal bird-like tones, just as though nothing unusual were taking place.

“Dear me, we are having some surprises this morning—quite a change. A common swindler, eh? And what has our friend Winslowe to offer by way of denial?”

Vernon had made no attempt to interrupt Sullivan’s denunciation. Throughout that ordeal and the moments that followed, he had been leaning back in his chair staring at the cabin skylight and stroking his chin with a solitary finger. He appeared oddly detached and unconcerned by the whole business. Even to the question Mr. Isinglass had put his showed no disposition to reply.

Then in his best Bradford manner Joshua boomed:

“We’re waiting for that denial, Captain Winslowe.”

Vernon stirred himself and, coming to attention, said crisply:

"I have no denials to offer."

There was a horrified gasp at the words, governed by Henry Julius.

"No denials?"

"Certainly not."

"Then may I ask——?"

But Vernon cut him short with a gesture.

"This matter is far too important to turn on either accusations or denials. The question as to whether I'm a swindler or he is a liar does not materially affect the case. What we have to decide is whether the business in hand is genuine or a fraud."

"Then," said Sullivan, cutting in, "it's a fraud."

"You stick to that?"

"Emphatically."

"Very well," said Vernon. "Then I've only one question to ask. If you believe the business to be a fraud, if you believe there is no hidden treasure on the island, what persuaded you directly you were aware of the object of our cruise, what persuaded you to take the mail from Colombo to Singapore, another steamer from Singapore to Sandakan, and finally stow yourself away aboard this yacht?"

The question was so utterly unexpected that Sullivan stumbled uselessly for an answer.

"Good shot!" exclaimed Henry Julius, and there was a chorus of excited "Ah's" from the others.

"Just let me add one or two details about this man," said Vernon, hastening to consolidate the ground he had won. "He lives by his wits at the expense of other people. To my cost I knew him in England—he got out of the country with five thousand of mine. As chance would have it, we ran into one another in Colombo, and I knocked him down. You may say that that is enough to explain his appearance in our midst to-day—a desire to get his own back."

Sullivan tried to interrupt.

"Carpenter," said Vernon, "stand beside that man, and if he attempts to speak, shove a gag in his mouth and hold it there. Thank you," as William stepped forward menacingly.

“To return to my point. If his only object had been to expose me as a fraud, why didn't he do it at Colombo and save himself the expense of a long sea voyage and the danger of getting aboard as a stowaway? The reason is that he got some information about this cruise, and believed that in it was a chance of making a fortune. He gambled on the likelihood that there was something shady in my life that I'd pay a long price to conceal, even to splitting my share of the treasure, assuming we find one. Well, in that pious hope he's backed a loser. I don't know what he has against me, but if anyone's curious to know, let 'em ask, I shan't stop 'em. It's been a nasty business, but, like other nasty businesses, it's not without a bright side. Whatever else may be said against Frank Sullivan, no one who's met him has ever denied that he has a sure sense of personal gain. That being so, his presence here, instead of proving the affair to be a fraud, seems to me the most encouraging argument in favour of our future success. That's all I have to say, and if Sullivan cares to reply to it he can.”

But whatever Sullivan's wishes may have been, he was not given the chance to express them. Vernon Winslowe had won the day gloriously, and his adherents—who were banging the table and exalting him—loudly declared that the matter admitted of no further argument whatever. Henry Julius went so far as to say if ever a man deserved keel-hauling, that man was Frank Sullivan. It would not have taken a great deal of encouragement to persuade them to pitch the intruder overboard.

Vernon rang the bell. To the steward who answered it he said:

“My compliments to Mr. Rogers, and ask him to come below.”

Young Mr. Rogers, first officer of the S.Y. *Mascot*, gasped when he saw Frank Sullivan.

“Mr. Rogers,” said Vernon, “this man came aboard as a stowaway. Hand him over to Mr. Macdonald for work in the engine-room.”

“All pretty good,” said Sullivan, as he was led out.

“Pretty damned good, old friend.” Then, with veins which suddenly looped into purple knots on his forehead: “By God, though——!”

“If he shows the slightest insubordination, put him in irons until he’s cooled down.”

“Very good, sir,” said Rogers.

As Vernon turned to go on deck, Averil’s hand brushed against his.

“I’m so proud of you,” said her eyes, and in the babel of tongues he was able to whisper:

“I did it without a lie, Averil.”

And she nodded at him.

“What a triumph for Winslowe,” exclaimed Henry Julius ecstatically. “By James, Mr. Isinglass, but he rolled that fellow up in the proper style.”

“Ye—es,” responded the old man slowly. “I think we congratulate ourselves on our leader. A brave and able fellow.’

Then quite suddenly he began to tremble and clenched his hands. “That Sullivan! How dare a man stand in the path of happiness?”

“You’re right. If I’d been in command, I’d have tarred and feathered the swine.”

Mr. Isinglass composed himself.

“I’m not as a rule given to violence,” he said, “but so would I, Julius—so would I.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“NEEDLE rock, meridian. Point of shadow, 15 paces due North, 3 West and under.”

Everyone knew those words by heart, and it would have been easy to prove whether or no the treasure actually lay buried in this spot had they been able to find a rock in any way resembling a needle. It was here the trouble began and ended as it began, in a complete *impasse*. Rocks there were in plenty, but none of the formation they sought. There was a rock that was like a Negro's head, another with the outline of a maned lion, a third which at a distance suggested one of the old monoliths at Stonehenge, but the rest were just rocks, rugged and formless, which by no stretch of imagination looked like a needle.

Yet in spite of this initial reverse no one betrayed the smallest anxiety or perturbation. The island itself was so essentially lovely, with its bowing palms mirrored in the water of a sleeping lagoon, with its coral reefs, golden sands and rivulets that clucked and chattered through wooded glades, that there was no room in their hearts for any feeling other than of gladness. From the smoke of tall chimneys, the press of petty affairs, the pinched horizon of hospital wards, of counter, of suburban villas and West Kensington flats, they had been released into a paradise, and like children free of school, they stretched their limbs and cried aloud their new joy to the skies.

Vernon had insisted, once they had landed on the island, that they should rely on no other service than their own.

“We'll have no idlers,” he said. “It's not my idea to let this affair degenerate into a country-house shooting-party, with flunkeys to dish out the grub. There'll be work for everyone.”

Supplies were landed from the yacht, groceries, a camp outfit and a number of little tents, but the highly qualified chef and the stewards were left on board.

Mr. Isinglass heartily supported Vernon's decision, but to the surprise of everyone he announced his intention of remaining on the yacht and taking no part in the activities ashore.

"This being in the nature of a Swiss Family Robinson business, shaken up with a dash of Robert Louis Stevenson, the presence of a non-worker is to be discouraged. I shall stop on board and read the ship's library and lead an utterly useless life. From time to time, if permitted, I will invite myself ashore for a day or two."

The real reason of his refusal to join the company was an ambition to study at intervals how everybody was getting on. Daily contact is a sure deadener of the senses. Changes for better or worse are more clearly revealed by a series of glimpses than by prolonged observation.

It is sad to relate that Joshua Morgan showed a regrettable tendency to follow the old man's example and bear him company on the *Mascot*, but Kate would have none of this.

"Us two," she said, "is supposed to be on our honeymoon; and if you fancy I'm goin' honeymooning without a man, you've made a mistake."

Joshua protested feebly.

"Aye, but my idea of a honeymoon doesn't tally with the program awaitin' us. My idea is a slap-up hotel with a terrace and comfortable chairs to sit on after a bit o' good food."

"It's a pity you didn't think o' that before," replied Kate.

Joshua agreed that it was a pity, for the gentle, calming influences of the South Seas were upon him, and he had no fancy for being "one of a gang." His objections, however, were overruled, and he was carried off, albeit reluctantly, to do a job of work with the rest.

The day they landed, Frank Sullivan asked for and was granted an interview. From the morning of his dramatic

appearance, he had become, from the passengers' point of view, as non-existent as any other stoker aboard a ship. Very occasionally he was glimpsed hanging up a shirt to dry, or leaning for a moment against the bulwarks, but he made no attempt to address anyone and no one addressed him. From having provided an acute sensation, he had become absorbed as part of the machinery. The engineer reported favourably upon him, stating that he performed his duties well and had given no trouble. Indeed, he appeared to have accepted misfortune in excellent good part, and had even contrived to earn some small popularity with members of the crew.

Having regard to all this, Vernon did not refuse his request for an interview, and Frank Sullivan, sweaty and grimed with coal dust, was shown into the cabin. Being in the presence of his captain, he touched his forelock in the approved style and waited until he should be spoken to.

"Yes, what is it you want?"

"Primarily, I want to go ashore. I have taken my gruel without grousing, and I put it to you as a sportsman that a touch of the old free pardon would be an act of grace."

"Why do you want to go ashore?"

"Because, without offence, I've had enough of this ship—and the company I've been thrown into—to last me a lifetime."

Vernon thought for a moment.

"I shall not put you ashore," he said, "for two reasons. First, that no one would welcome your presence on the island."

"As to that, I'm perfectly prepared to fend for myself."

"And the second is that steamers only call here at rare intervals, and it might mean your staying for months or even longer."

"I'd take a chance of that."

"I'm sorry," said Vernon.

"But, damn it, man, do you intend to keep me a prisoner on the yacht?"

"You will remember you came on the yacht of your own

accord. Added to that, Mr. Rogers will shortly be taking her to Honolulu for coal and supplies. I shall give him orders to leave you there."

"Oh, you will, will you?" Then with an angry flare: "And what the devil am I going to do at Honolulu?"

"You can do what you like," came the answer.

"And that's your last word?"

"It is."

"By God, Winslowe, you'll come the top dog a bit too much one of these days."

There was a light in Sullivan's eyes that was not quite normal, a crooked light revealing, for a second, through the mask of amiability that he wore, the secret of his crooked nature. It flashed out and was gone, but while it lasted Vernon could plainly read the depth of this man's enmity. And it was no ordinary enmity, but rather a rabid, homicidal thing, made more dangerous by the leashes of apparent good nature that restrained it.

"Look here, Sullivan," he said warningly. "Take my advice and don't go looking for trouble. You've played a hand and lost, and I tell you fairly, if you try any funny games, you're for it."

"Yes," said Sullivan slowly. "I've lost, but perhaps the game isn't quite played out yet, old friend." He moved towards the door and turned. "By the way, how's the love affair going on?"

Without waiting for an answer, he darted across the deck and clattered down the fo'c'sle companion-way.

Frank Sullivan was leaning over the bulwarks when the landing party went ashore. He even waved a hand to wish them God-speed.

"Ee," sighed Kate Morgan. "I can't help feeling thankful we've left that chap behind."

"You've seen the last of him," said Vernon. "When the *Mascot* goes to Honolulu, they'll drop him there."

"And a good riddance, too," said Henry Julius. Then: "My God, isn't that beautiful?"

The loveliness of the island had smitten him like a blow.

A duty roster was drawn up, framed and hung to a tree in the camp, and the passengers of the *Mascot* busied themselves with preparations and arrangements. The only work that was not compulsory was treasure-seeking. This being the object of the enterprise, it was absurd to make it a duty.

For the first three weeks after their arrival, in twos and threes they searched every square foot of the island for the rock, but no success rewarded their labours. The island itself was small, a typical South Sea atoll, and it seemed improbable that any portion of it could have been overlooked. Yet day followed day and no rock in the form of a needle was located. Many were the theories put forward to account for this mysterious fact, prominent among them the suggestion that it might have been toppled over in an earthquake, to which that part of the world is no stranger.

Vernon's activities were tireless. Never for an instant would he reveal the disappointment he felt, but rather he worked the harder because of it. Long after the others had knocked off work for the day he would be combing the woods and the rising ground and the seashore until forced to return for lack of light. Then with the dawn he would be up and about before the rest had stirred, reappearing at early breakfast with plans and dispositions for the day.

At first everyone, even Kate Morgan, with whom walking was never a strong point, eagerly joined in the search, but after about three weeks one by one they began to fall away and turn their attentions to other matters less strenuous but more profitable.

Sometimes strange and often familiar were the reasons which drew them from their primary object. William Carpenter, for example, had developed an unquenchable ambition to build things. His ideas in this direction were catholic. He did not in the least mind what he built as long as he was allowed to build something. As a builder he was a great success. He built field-ovens, a fence, a trough for washing clothes, and, as a supreme triumph of his architectural genius, a recreation-room. In the construction of this latter, which was composed of an upright framework

of bamboos plaited with palm fronds and daubed with clay, he was driven to refer to Vernon's superior mechanical knowledge. The walls he could manage, but the roof defeated him. His first attempt was discouraging, having collapsed and enveloped those who recreated themselves beneath. So Vernon made sketches of a king post truss, the simplicity and efficiency of which excited William's unbounded admiration. Thereafter king post trusses featured in everything he made. The roof of the cookhouse was sustained in this way, as also was the shelter he made beneath which they took their meals when the sun was at its height. Naturally such important operations could not be carried out single-handed, and Lydia found herself pressed into service as a mate. William proved a hard taskmaster who never hesitated to criticize her roundly if she failed to work to his satisfaction. William had achieved a moral victory over Lydia, and he did not intend to relinquish the spoils. The victory had taken place a few days after they landed on the island. Viewed in retrospect, it was a simple affair. He had shown her some small courtesy in a matter of no importance—it was one of those nervous, anxious courtesies which invariably provoked all that was worst in her.

"I can't stick you," she had said. "Can't stick your nervous, namby ways. Lord, I don't believe there's anything you're not f—f—frightened of."

The stammer was in perfect imitation of his natural hesitancy. It cut his anger to the quick and fired the reply:

"Say that again—just once again."

She did, this time with the loud pedal down.

There were sharks in the lagoon—two of them—not fifty yards away. Like small black sails their fins cut the smooth surface of the water as they ranged for food. William went into the lagoon head first and swam towards them—between them—around them. Lydia, white and silent, stood stock-still—frozen—then she screamed piercingly, terribly. A succession of screams. Presently William was standing before her again, the water pouring from his clothes.

“Say it again,” he demanded. “Will you say that again?”

But she would not. Perhaps she had screamed her voice away. There may have been excuse for what followed. It is difficult to judge. William Carpenter had sustained many injuries from the hands of Lydia La Rue; he chose this moment to repay them with interest. He was wearing sand-shoes, plimsolls with whippy soles. One of these he removed, and with it he whacked Lydia—not in temper—but systematically—thoroughly and ceremonially. When he had finished, he did not read her a lecture, he did not say he was sorry, he did not say anything. He just put on his shoe and walked away. And Lydia walked after him. The matter was never referred to again except tacitly in every subsequent word Lydia ever spoke to him. So she was quite satisfied to be his mate and to hold a board which was being sawn or fill her mouth with tacks or do anything else he told her to do. And, strange though it may sound, in this new submission she discovered happiness. Obviously, then, it was waste of time to go hunting all over the place for a treasure that might never be found.

Tommy Gates was the real enthusiast as a treasure-seeker. He was almost as indefatigable as Vernon. He would have been quite as indefatigable had Olive Banbury let him.

“Oh, yes, the place suits you all right, and you’re better than you’ve been for years. I know all about that,” she said, “but you’ll please to remember you’ve got a heart.”

“I don’t forget it,” he replied, and threw a compliment at her, which she condemned in words but secretly rejoiced over.

“You’ve got to take care of yourself.”

“As long as you’re about, I can’t see the need. That’s a graceless way of putting it, but you know what I mean. Never was a fellar who owed so much to a woman as I do. You gave up everything to make me fit again. Can’t think why.”

“Habit,” said Olive.

“Then thank God for habits,” said he.

It was just after dawn and the orange rim of the horizon was changing to pearl and turquoise.

“You are a brick to get up bright and early and bear me company.”

“I’m as keen to find the treasure as you are. No one else seems to bother.”

“I know, and somehow one hates jogging ’em. Why, even Henry Julius has given up work in favour of a water-colour box. He wants to rechristen this island The Haystack because it’s so jolly hard to find the needle.”

“And look at Mary!”

It was generally agreed that Mary had not been at all companionable of late. As Mr. Isinglass observed, here again were reflexes at work. She seemed to prefer wandering off on her own, gathering flowers, picking up shells, and sometimes talking to the natives of the island, who had a few words of English which they could produce upon occasion. There was one old fellow in particular with whom she spent a lot of time, not on account of his gifts as a talker, but because in earlier manhood he had frequently nourished himself upon human flesh. Kaifulu was the old fellow’s name, and his disposition, possibly from dietic causes, was benign. He took an immediate fancy to Mary, and recounted to her orgies of a fearful kind in language so simple as to deprive them of their horror.

Oddly enough, Mary did not mind Kaifulu having been a cannibal; if anything, she rejoiced in the knowledge, not because she esteemed the practice of cannibalism as being a worthy one, but for the delicious thrill it gave her to converse with such a man. In the past her conversations had mainly been with persons whose chief article of nutriment was arrowroot; it was an agreeable variation, therefore, to talk with one who had been nourished on stronger meat and had, as a result, preserved in later years a superior digestion and a more agreeable outlook on life in general.

Kaifulu did not confine himself to a single topic; he had a wide experience in other matters, and often would talk

about island devils, claiming personal acquaintance with several; also he talked of trade, of epidemics, of leprosy and earthquakes and love, and all the other plagues and scourges of humanity. He knew the history of the island from its earliest beginning. He never told the same story twice because, generally speaking, he invented them as he went along, and it was easier to invent a new story than remember an old.

It was a long walk to the hut of Kaifulu, but Mary never noticed it. She went there eagerly and returned too full of amazement to be aware of distances.

In the course of these walks she would sometimes meet Henry Julius, a palette on his thumb, a fly whisk in one hand, and a sable water-colour brush in the other. Henry was busy making "colour notes," and he treasured Mary's appreciation. As works of art the "colour notes" were not of outstanding merit. For one thing, he could not draw, but he saw with amazing fidelity and refinement and his sense of values was exceptional. His poverty as a draughtsman was, in some measure, balanced by his conversational abilities, for what he lacked in line he supplied in words. His explanations of his sketches were probably their strongest feature. He worked very much as Max Beerbohm works, by combining clever drawing and clever descriptive sentences, but whereas Max writes his sentences with an exquisitely-sharpened pencil point, Henry Julius supplied enlightenment through the medium of spoken words and gestures.

"All this part to look as if insects are droning over it—see! A kind of greyness—a bloom—that's what I mean by that purply note. Colour to suggest sound. Why not? Whistler did it—those rockets, you know—Cremorne. Now on beyond there the surf—I've left it out—it beats me. The roar—impossible."

He would ramble on for ages like that—absorbed, obsessed, feeling like a god in the joy of creation. Then:

"It's marvellous how you understand me—my ambitions, Miss Ottery, what I'm trying to get at—marvellous."

"I used not to understand you," she replied gravely, add-

ing with that new courage of hers: "I used to think you were a thoroughly disreputable person."

"Yes, perhaps, I don't know. I think sometimes there are dividing lines in my nature, the one leads to appreciation, the other to success."

Mary nodded.

"And just now you've left the line of success to take care of itself."

"Yes, I suppose. You see, Winslowe is looking after us in that direction, so I'm free to follow the other."

"You trust him?"

"More than I trust myself," came the sincere assurance. "Winslowe isn't the man to let anyone down."

"What I'd like to think," said Mary, "is that it wouldn't matter if he did, that all he promised has been given."

"Ye—es," replied Henry dubiously. "Still, we *are* on a treasure hunt, you know.

"Has it ever struck you why some of us have given up looking?"

"How do you mean, exactly?"

"Why, we've drifted away into the quiet places of ourselves."

"There's so much here that's new."

"I think it is," she went on, "because the lines of appreciation and the lines of success have met in most of us—and in you, too—more than you imagine."

"I dare say—at least for the moment. There's no knowing, of course, where I may drop all this and go off again on a get-rich-quick stunt."

"Let's hope," said Mary, "it won't be at someone else's expense this time."

At which he laughed.

Mary did not approve of that laugh. It argued that the predatory strain, although dormant in his nature, was still unconquered by sudden contact with and sudden appreciation for real beauty. A sense of inanimate beauty is at best only skin-deep. His eyes had been softened, but his heart was unchanged.

“Well, good-bye,” she said, and proceeded with her walk.

“Don’t you get very lonely on these long marches all by yourself?” he called after her.

And she replied without turning round:

“Good Lord—they’re heaven!”

After which mighty digression let us return to the dialogue between Olive Banbury and Tommy Gates which inspired it.

“Why didn’t you wear your coat this morning?”

“It’ll be hot as blazes in an hour,” he answered.

“Then you should have brought a hat.”

“Sun never hurt anyone.”

“Tommy, you are an ass,” said she.

“Thank God, I’m a happy one. Oh, Olive, ain’t that sunrise marvellous?”

“Pretty good,” she nodded.

He turned and looked at her thoughtfully.

“I can’t make you out—why you won’t let yourself go a bit more—seems to me you are always on the edge of enjoying yourself but won’t take that one step forward.”

“The answer’s simple. I’m a practical woman, and as such I mean to be dead sure how I stand before I let myself go.”

“Stand.”

“Yes—I want to know past misunderstanding, whether what I am living now is what I am going to keep or whether it is only an episode that’s going to finish where it began, with a smell of iodoform.”

“I see. Much the same here; but the future is on the knees of the gods, who are being pretty generous as to the present.”

“Got any money, Tommy?”

“I used to be very well off. That’s to say, I was well off when I only had three months to live—but now I’ve an extension of the time limit——”

“Like that?”

“To quote from the immortal Rudyard: ‘The meat is very near the bone.’”

She tapped her foot on the ground.

“Ss! That’s what I was afraid of. It’ll be such an infernal shame——”

“Oh, come,” said he. “I ought to be satisfied and I am satisfied. I exalt the name of Winslowe every night before I turn in. That fellow’s filled my cup with gratitude, whatever bad luck may be waiting ahead. He’s a genius.”

“Yes—but I’d be a deal more grateful myself if his genius led him to that needle rock.” And she looked steadily at the boy that she and the balm of the South Seas breezes had saved from dying. In the dawn light his face was rosy as a cherub’s. He looked so fresh, so well, so deserving of life.

With sudden angry determination she swung the pick to her shoulder and tilted her head toward the bush.

“Come on, let’s dig.”

“Right-oh! Here, give us your hand. It’s rough going.”

“I can manage.”

“What’s that matter?”

Hand in hand they made their way through a path in the undergrowth.

CHAPTER XXXV.

“**H**OW anyone expects a body to make vegetable soup without shallots is a question without an answer.”

So said Kate Morgan, a rosy-looking carrot in one hand and a kitchen knife in the other. Before her crackled a wood fire over which, from a tripod, hung a black pot from which issued a savoury smell. Kate's sleeves were rolled up, revealing at her elbows two absurdly large dimples. She was sitting on a piece of rock chipping the carrot into the trough of her apron.

Sprawling on the ground at her feet was Lydia, vulgarly employed removing the insides from a basketful of multi-coloured fish. Her face was brown as a chocolate bean, her hair was twisted up anyhow to keep it out of the way, and her clothes, which consisted of a man's tennis-shirt and an old skirt, were in rather a pickle. She looked like one of Rossetti's girls, who had flung away her robes and lilies and come down to facts. She looked splendid. The nature of her task had attracted a great many flies, who buzzed round her greedily.

“Oh, damn the flies,” she said, then quickly covered her mouth with the back of her hand and glanced over her shoulder.

“It's all right,” said Kate, “he's not about.”

“Who isn't?”

“Your William, to be sure. He's having his swim.”

“H'm,” said Lydia. “Still, I promised to tell him if I swore and I've done it eight times already to-day.”

“Have you kept count?”

“Yes. If I go over the ten, I'm for a ducking.”

Kate shook with a curious form of suppressed laughter, which she reserved for the most agreeable kind of jokes. Ordinarily speaking, she laughed right out.

"I'd like to see Joshua duck me," she said.

Lydia sniffed.

"I don't mind a ducking now and then—I like it—I like anything determined."

Kate shook her head and smiled.

"You're a queer one, Lydia, so you are—a proper surprise packet and all."

"I don't see why."

"The manner of your change—it beats me to fathom it."

"This place has changed most of us. I'm not the only one."

Kate admitted the truth of this with a nod.

"Still, you had a long way to go, my dear. When I think of that first time I saw you—the dress you was wearing and your manner, and compare it with——"

"Comparisons are rotten."

"I'm sorry," said Kate, and dropped a fat hand on Lydia's shoulder.

Lydia squeezed the hand and left it rather fishy as a result.

"You needn't be sorry," said she, splitting open a new fish whose scales embodied every colour of the rainbow. "I know well enough the sort I was. Oh, get away or be swatted" (this to a very persistent bluebottle). "Don't expect you met many of my sort before, that's all."

"Well, you see," Kate admitted, "I was ever too busy for goin' out much at night—and meeting people." She hurriedly attached the last three words, being suddenly appalled by the significance of what had been intended as an innocent remark.

Lydia laughed.

"I like you, you speak out of your heart, and it gets you in all sorts of difficulties, doesn't it?"

Kate, abashed, and furiously red in the face, admitted her conversational shortcomings and added:

"It isn't that I want to say things, they just slip out."

"That's it, and don't I know it? We're a pair in that way, only it wasn't saying things, it was doing them with me."

“Eh?”

“Oh, we’re just alike. Emotion rules the pair of us, only there was always plenty of sense to govern yours. That’s upbringing, perhaps—mine was rotten. Father drank because he was a failure and mother was always a coward when she ought to have been brave. Funny childhood, mine. I was educated on rows. Things were never told me any other way. So I got into the habit of having rows with myself instead of thinking things out quietly. What a muddle! Mother’s weakness made me terribly frightened of being afraid. That’s why I stole something one day—nothing much—a pair of cotton gloves from a haberdasher’s—I sent ’em back.”

“Stole?”

“Um! You see, I was scared of doing it—so I did it. Ha! Lots of things I used to be scared of until they became easy. Then, of course, I hated ’em—and myself. Once when I was about sixteen I stopped with some cousins—awfully pious cousins they were. They left a Bible by my bedside and a candle for me to read it by. I started to read it for a joke—and then it ceased to be a joke and something tremendous happened inside me. Pooh! This fish is a goner.” She threw out her arm and the fish described a silver arc through the air and fell with a splash in a rock pool.

“While you’re about it,” said Kate, “shove them guts on fire, dear. They’re a bit over-savoury in this heat.”

Lydia did so.

“That’s better. You was sayin’?”

“Oh, about that Bible. Something happened inside me—can’t describe what—felt like glory. I remember I made a cross out of a shoe-horn and an ivory comb, and I put the candle on the mantelpiece and prayed and prayed until it had gone out and dawn was breaking. Kind of religious fervour, I suppose.”

“How do you mean, dear—fervour?”

“Same as any other kind of fervour—falling in love, for instance—the feeling is just the same.”

“Getting religion.”

“Hum!”

Kate turned her attention to a pail of potatoes that needed peeling.

“How did you come to lose it again?”

“I don’t know. At least, I do know. I went and saw the vicar of the place next morning and told him I’d found the light. I couldn’t help not knowing the words to use—said I wanted to serve the Lord. He was all right, I suppose, but he was fat and smug and too well fed. I don’t think he was used to enthusiasts like me, for I’d have died at the stake that morning. He said: ‘Excellent, excellent,’ with a smile, and he pinched my cheek. That did it. I don’t know why, but he pinched every scrap of religion out of me—like pinching out the burning wick of a candle. After that——” but she changed her mind about going on with the chronological details of her career, and instead threw in a word of self-pity. “I don’t think I was a bad lot at heart—it was never getting one’s knuckles rapped—no discipline—no one to be afraid of—that and a temperament. Anything reacts on me, you know. If I go into a cathedral I want to cry—if I go into a cabaret I want to dance—and here in this island, with the clear sea and the sun, I want to be healthy.”

Once again Kate’s fat dimpled arm went out and this time circled the girl’s neck.

“I understand,” she said. “And it seems to me, Lydia, you’re like some lovely instrument no one yet has found the knack of playing on. But mark my words, dear, that someone isn’t far off.”

In a sudden impulse of confidence Lydia put her arms round Kate and clung to her tightly.

“Tell me!” she cried. “Tell me honestly, you do believe it’s going to last, don’t you?”

“What’s going to last, dear?”

“This new me—this healthier me—this out-of-doors me that likes to laugh, to work, even to be bullied. Tell me it’s going to last, because if I thought—if it happened that—oh! I just couldn’t bear slipping back again to that old life with

all the vile ugliness of it—the moods—the temper—the—I've learnt to laugh at myself now—to see myself—why, I can even like myself, but if all that is going to——”

“Hush, dear,” said Kate, “working yourself up like that.”

“But you don't know—you can't know what it means to be able to laugh at yourself because for the first time on record you've a right to take yourself seriously.”

Kate Morgan missed that. Her answer was a practical one:

“Depend upon it, what with excavations here, there and everywhere, and Captain Winslowe working his fingers to the bone on the haft of a spade, that treasure'll come to light, and then you'll be able to choose your own path, my dear, and follow it to journey's end.”

Lydia nodded thoughtfully.

“Yes, I suppose it comes down to that. If we find the treasure, why, then, good enough—if not——! Lord, though, it's a damned poor confession to make. I've come out here to find something and I've found it. It's a damned rotten state of affairs if I can only reckon to keep it by finding something else.”

She stopped suddenly to ask:

“Did I use some language then?”

“Aye, dear, two ‘damns.’ ”

“Two, and that makes ten.”

She rose and covered the basket of fish with a handful of wet rushes.

“You don't want me for half an hour, do you?”

“Where are you off to?”

“To get what's coming to me, that's all.”

“Oh, your ducking. See here, if you like I'll pretend I didn't catch them last two ‘damns.’ ”

“No fear, I'm through with lies.”

And, sticking her hands in the pockets of her skirt, she marched off to the lagoon.

William Carpenter, in a pair of blue dungaree breeches and nothing else, was sitting on a rock baiting a line. His duty for the morning was to provide supplies, in which there

was always considerable competition. Tommy Gates, whose job it had been the day before, had been surprisingly successful. The fish he had caught had been numerous, the birds he had shot had been excellent, and he had further distinguished himself by swapping with one of the natives a bead necklace of no merit whatsoever for a countless supply of fresh eggs. To rival this high percentage of successes, William's work was cut out.

"Hallo!" he said to Lydia. "I thought you were on kitchen fatigue."

"I was, but I've knocked off for a bit."

"Did you get your pass signed?"

William was a stickler for duty.

"Yes, she said I could go. I wanted to see you."

"If you want me to do anything you'll be unlucky. My time's full up. Stand clear a moment."

He swung the plummet three times round his head and released it. The neatly coiled line sailed out in a beautiful parabola and the lead fell with a plonk far out into the lagoon.

"They are biting badly, so I'm trying them with a bit of squid. Look out! Don't sit on it. Don't see what you want to sit down for at all."

"To talk to you."

"Well, talk away."

She said nothing for a moment, then:

"I've been swearing again." There was real penitence in her voice. She looked up to see how he accepted the news. He accepted it without any sign of sympathy.

"Who was there?"

"She was."

"Mrs. Morgan?"

Lydia nodded.

"I should have thought she'd be the last one you'd want to swear in front of."

"I didn't want to swear."

"That means you couldn't stop yourself?"

"Suppose it does."

William was silent the while he baited a new line with pieces cut from the squid. When he had finished he wiped his forefinger and thumb on the seat of his bags.

“That’s a pretty poor confession—couldn’t help yourself.”

“I know it is.”

“It isn’t that I particularly mind your swearing. It’s silly, but there’s no great harm in a few ‘damns.’ ”

“Look here,” she retorted, “I don’t want you to make excuses for me.”

“I wasn’t—I was going on to say what I do mind is the utter feebleness of not being able to stop when you want to.”

“H’m! That’s the way I’m made, I suppose.” There was a touch of insurrection in the reply.

“You’re best judge of that,” he answered. “Still, I shouldn’t boast about it.”

“I wasn’t boasting.”

“Glad to hear it. Well, how many times did you swear?”

“All the lot.”

“Ten?”

“Yes.”

“And you’ve come for your ducking?”

“Yes.”

There was an indefinable air of guilty satisfaction about her.

William noted that and frowned.

“This crime and punishment stuff is getting too regular,” he said. “I think you want a change of diet. So you can go and duck yourself this morning, Lydia.”

She looked at him resentfully, and seeing that he became bitterly angry with her, with an anger inspired by a quick realization that in some subtle sense she derived a kind of gratification from the punishments he inflicted on her.

“For the future you can do your own ducking as well as your own swearing.”

There was more than a touch of the old Lydia in the blaze of her eyes.

“All right. Yes—all right—I will.”

“Do,” he said, and slowly turned to cast his second line.

Somehow it got tangled with his foot and snagged badly. Stooping to clear the coil, he saw she was no longer beside him. She was lying on a flat shelf of rock a few yards away, her head was submerged in a pool which they called the ducking-pool. He watched her for a while, then, with sudden enlightenment, leapt across the intervening space and picked her up in his arms. Her face was almost black, and water ran from her mouth.

"Good God!" he cried, and began to work her arms fiercely. Also he hung her over his shoulder upside down and thumped her lungs.

When the salt water was out of her and she had begun to breathe normally, he propped her up against a rock and, kneeling opposite, he stared at her in great amazement.

At last:

"Lydia," he said. "Lydia, are you mad? What were you thinking of to do that?"

But she only smiled, and it was a queerly innocent smile and a queerly satisfied smile and tremendously for him.

But even so he did not kiss her.

For one thing, she would not have let him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NO child believes in its heart that a perfect holiday will ever end. It is a realization that only comes when the sudden clangor of the school-bell startles the birds into silence, and like a magnet draws unwilling feet from the green shade of forests and the sun-drenched expanses of yellow sand back to the wooden desks and benches of routine.

But Vernon knew—and knew, moreover, that unless a kindly providence led to the finding of the treasure that end was drawing rapidly in view.

Save for himself, Averil, Tommy Gates and Olive, the rest had been lulled by the balm of the South Sea breezes into happy inactivity. While these four worked, the others dreamed, and the hastening weeks went by.

Of the original capital little now remained, barely enough for another month's stay on the island and the provisioning of the yacht for the homeward journey.

If only Ralph Whittaker had replied to Vernon's appeal and succeeded in raising a few thousands on his uncle's will, the case would not have been so bad. But Ralph's silence, taken in conjunction with their failure to discover the old pirate's cache, was tormenting. It seemed that Vernon was to be denied even the chance to repay the original investments.

In that respect something would have to be done and done quickly.

The following day the yacht would be sailing for Honolulu. Accordingly, Vernon wrote a long letter to a firm of solicitors at that port, instructing them to act on his behalf in the matter of raising a reversion. This letter he gave to Mr. Isinglass with the request that it should be delivered personally in the event of there being no registered package awaiting him at the firm of McAndrews, Ltd.

Mr. Isinglass frowned and cocked an eyebrow when asked to do this; he consented, however, without demur or question.

It had been arranged that Joshua Morgan should go with Mr. Isinglass on the trip, he of all the company having found life on the island a trifle irksome. Work with pick and shovel was not much in his line, nor were there any Bradford men with whom he could discuss Midland trade conditions over a mug of brown ale. His time had been spent idling and smoking too much. Faithful to original intention, he had made one or two attempts to "walk out" Kate beneath the moon and talk to her in the tones of a suitor, but these experiments were not a pronounced success. They found themselves too old for the job, and conversations erotically begun quickly reverted to the practical affairs of every day and not infrequently to a sharp exchange of rebukes. They talked about their children rather than themselves, and seemed entirely unable to recapture a spark of a thirty-year-old romance. As Joshua remarked:

"It was a deal easier to talk to thee, Kate, when us used to go for them walks by the gasworks and I was counter-jumping at Harris's and you was helping your mother."

Then Kate would remember there were plates to wash up and would return to those humble duties, leaving Joshua to smoke a pipe on the dreary beaches.

So Joshua was granted leave of absence, and a farewell supper was given on the night the *Mascot* was to sail. Rather a sad affair it proved, for with the imminence of his departure Kate cried in her plate and her gloom was reflected upon everyone else. There was about the affair a hint of a general break-up, as must be so when even insignificant units of a happy party are removed. Even Mr. Isinglass found it hard to preserve an air of gaiety, though he chattered away in a light-hearted vein and prophesied on their return the treasure would have been found. Probably William Carpenter was the most cheerful member of the circle. He had been happily employed throughout the day in fixing up an aerial and a wireless receiving-station. It was fun to think that the *Mascot* would be in communication

with the island and could send messages of love and hope from the vasty deep. Arrangements had been made that William should preside at the instrument for two separate half-hours each day, between 9 and 9.30 A.M. and P.M. After so many years in a post office, it was not unnatural that William was acquainted with signal services. He was proud, however, of being in possession of a specialized talent shared by no one else.

It was approaching midnight when they all filed down to the landing-place to bid farewell to the voyagers.

With Midland heartiness, or possibly to conceal his emotions, Joshua Morgan kissed all the ladies not once but many times. His wife he did not kiss particularly, but he hugged her a great deal—their two fat little bodies bouncing off each other on the release of the terrific pressure of each embrace. Then the little boat put out from the shore and diminishing farewells boomed to and fro across the glassy water. Fainter and fainter they grew until at last Kate's voice cracked and she sat down abruptly on a hard rock and threw her apron over her head.

Vernon and Averil picked their way along the half-circle of the coral reefs to watch the *Mascot* steam out of the mouth of the lagoon. Presently she came, dim and ghostly, surmounted by the gleam of her masthead lights. They could hear the soft pulsing of her engines and the lap, lap, from the wash of waves she set in motion. The night was dark and her passing was more a matter of feel than of sight. Like a mist upon the water, she drifted by within a hundred yards of where they stood.

“*Au 'voir—bon voyage,*” called Averil.

And:

“Good luck,” came trailing back.

The sound of the engines died away. The masthead lights became little stars. And suddenly Vernon cried out:

“We must make it a success, Averil. We must—we must!”

It was a *cri de cœur*, the first he had uttered in her presence. She slipped her arm through his and held it tight.

"We will," she said.

Then a silence. Then:

"This seems all so much a part of it," he muttered. "Our standing close together as if for me the treasure were found, Averil, by just this. And yet——"

He felt her nod.

"I know what you would say—I feel that, too."

"It's standing in the shadow—and wanting——"

He broke off and pointed to where something moved in the shoal waters by the head of the reef.

"What's that? There! D'you see?"

The dark object came nearer, stayed still, then rippled away into the obscurity of the night.

"I don't know," she said. "A porpoise?"

"May have been, although—— It's late, we'd best get back now."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

“COMING out?” said Tommy Gates, popping a head into Vernon’s tent. “It’s seven o’clock and I’ve got a notion.”

“Yes, in half a jiffy.”

Vernon dressed and shaved, and was standing irresolute, casting a roving eye round the appointments of his tent.

“You look like a man whose collar-stud has given him the slip. Lost anything?”

“No—at least—Tommy, when we were out yesterday I had my rifle, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you were hoping to bag——”

“I know. I leant it against that rock when we were digging.”

“That’s so! Why?”

“I couldn’t have left it there, could I?”

“No, I’m certain you brought it. Of course you did. You let off at an old shag on the way back. And I was in here when you cleaned it.”

“Well, it’s damned funny.”

“Has it gone?”

“Um! And a box of cartridges.”

“One of the lads borrowed it.”

“I dare say—still! Now where the blazes is my hat?” Tommy pointed.

“No, the other one. Never mind, this’ll do. Come on, what’s the notion?”

It was the morning following the departure of the *Mascot*—a glorious morning of dazzling sunlight that turned the insects in the air into flying gems.

“May be nothing in it,” said Tommy, “springs out of something Mary said as we were walking back last night.”

“Well?”

“That old chap Kaifula or whatever he calls himself was showing off his treasures to her, and among them was an old gold coin and a weapon, which from her description sounded to be like a cutlass of sorts. Seems Mary didn’t ask any questions about them and only mentioned them to me by chance.”

“You’re thinking they possibly may be——”

“Oh, I don’t know—but it might be worth while to step over and have a look at the stuff. It would be interesting to know how he came by them.”

Vernon nodded.

“We certainly will. Any idea what the cutlass looked like?”

“Mary’d know. Why?”

“We had a few relics of my disreputable ancestor at home.”

“Then you’d be able to recognize it——”

“I’ve a fair idea of the type of weapon they used.”

Tommy was tingling with excitement.

“Come on, then, let’s shout for breakfast and make a start.”

There was no need to shout, for Kate had already prepared the meal.

“You haven’t got what I intended to give you,” she announced, “which was a lovely ham—but somehow or another, what with the fuss of poor Joshua’s going away, I’ve mislaid it.”

“But you can’t mislay a ham,” Lydia laughed.

“I don’t propose to argue the point,” said Kate. “There’s a rare lot of stuff in store-room and maybe, after all, I never put out tin as I intended.”

“Bother the old ham,” said Olive. “There’s something much more important to talk about. Go on, Tommy, tell ’em.”

Tommy told—and excitement, which will prosper on a very small excuse, ran high. It ran higher still when Mary,

who was a little late that morning, put in an appearance and proceeded to describe with faithful accuracy a sixteenth-century cutlass.

It ran so high that nothing would satisfy them but that the whole company, Kate included, should instantly set forth for the hut of Kaifulu.

“Although,” said William, “on second thoughts, you, Lydia, had better stop here and mind Marconi House in case I’m a bit late.”

“But I can’t understand that silly buzzing,” she protested.

“Of course, if you’d rather I stayed,” said William in his best strong and silent style.

“Oh, go on then,” said she. “I’ll stay.”

It was a very excited company that gathered at the door of Kaifulu’s abode. The old cannibal came forth and offered them a great variety of greetings and resolutely refused to show them any of his treasures until many preliminary courtesies had been observed. His manners were charming if irritating, for he insisted on producing articles of no conceivable interest to his audience, and withholding until the end the very things they had come to see. With each article was a history of prodigious length, and their patience was well nigh exhausted when at last the cutlass and the coin were exhibited.

“Well?” said Tommy eagerly.

Henry Julius was examining the coin with a watchmaker’s lens. He always had some odd thing like that in his pocket—a trick lighter—a hook for removing stones from horses’ hoofs—a corkscrew or a roll of lint.

“Early Spanish,” he answered.

“And the cutlass?”

That was Vernon’s province.

“Undoubtedly sixteenth century.”

Tommy and William gasped in unison, and Old Kaifulu was besieged with questions as to how he had come by them. In effect his reply was the rather improbable statement that the earth opened and delivered them into the hands of his

fathers, which, when analysed, argued that these relics of a bygone age had been vomited out of their resting-place as the result of an earthquake.

“And this would be?”

“When my grandfather was even smaller than the little ones who play yonder.”

A very fine story he made of it; a story of a mighty storm that drove the sea to frenzy and swept canoes up the beach to hang like nests in the palm-tops. Followed a great trembling of the earth, in which huts fell and many perished, and the sea ate up long stretches of what once was land. Many things were changed.

“Yes, by God,” said Henry Julius, “and ten to one that needle-rock came tumbling down.”

After the storm the great-grandfather of Kaifulu went forth to take stock of the havoc and perchance to seek comfort from wreckage which had come ashore. And then it was beside a fresh-opened fissure in the ground he came across the coin and the cutlass in the midst of a tangle of crumbled bones, which turned to dust even as he stretched out a hand to touch them. The cutlass, the coin, and a few buttons, since lost, were all he was able to bring away.

“Do you know where he found these bits?” Henry demanded.

Old Kaifulu shook his head.

“It was never told.”

Throughout the length of this recital Vernon had never taken his eyes off the hilt of the cutlass. Something about it seemed to fascinate him.

“Kaifulu,” he said, “will you trade this weapon with me? I would give many English pounds.”

Kaifulu thought and stroked his chin.

“It has been long in my family, but——”

Henry touched Vernon’s arm.

“Shouldn’t waste any money. We’ve learnt all we can from the thing.”

“Yes, but have we?” came the reply. “I don’t know.”

“Please yourself, of course.”

A bargain was struck and the party started homeward.

As they neared the camp William smote one hand against the other.

“Good Lord, if I haven’t forgotten all about Marconi House.”

“It’s too late to worry now,” said Tommy Gates, glancing at his watch. “After all, there’s not likely to be any news. By gad, that old chap’s story was pretty thrilling—wonder if it’ll do us any good.”

“You’re a beauty,” said Lydia when they arrived. “That beastly thing’s been buzzing away like a hornet’s nest.”

“Aye,” added Kate Morgan, “and if it isn’t enough that you wasn’t there to take down old Josh’s love messages, I can’t lay my hands on that missing ham, nowhere.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THIS day, so eventfully begun, was to provide further incident. After the midday meal the company broke up to pursue their various vocations. The search party searched, Mary wandered by the sea, and Henry drifted off into the bush with paint-box and easel. All this was normal enough, but, coming back in the late evening, Tommy saw a figure half a mile away across the beaches. Thinking it was William, he gave a hail, but instead of responding the figure vanished into the fringe of coco-nut palms and was seen no more.

This incident, small enough in itself, was the precursor of others more mysterious. For example, Mrs. Morgan discovered that not only the tinned ham had vanished from her store, but other comestibles as well. There being no ready explanation for the fact, she concluded that some of the island boys had raided the camp during the night. This theory was supported by Lydia's statement that a spare blanket which she kept rolled up in her tent had disappeared.

Vernon, to whom these mysterious losses were reported at the evening meal, shook his head at Kate's solution, and expressed the view that in the main these island boys were an honest crowd and would hardly risk the chance of picking up a stray bullet by robbing a well-armed camp.

"Well, you don't suggest I've buried the ham," said Kate tartly; "or poor Lydia's blanket either?"

"No—but——" He stopped as his thoughts reverted to the strange disappearance of his rifle and his hat, which, in the other excitements of the day, had passed from his mind.

"No—but—it's certainly very peculiar."

"One thing I am sure," said Mary, "that that nice Kaifulu would never permit his people to steal."

“Then who has bagged the stuff?” asked Tommy. Then to Vernon: “By Jove, and there was that——”

But Vernon waved him into silence.

“We’ll look into the matter in the morning,” he said. “William, lend me a pair of pliers, there’s a good chap.”

Armed with the pliers, and taking Tommy for company, he made off for his tent.

“No good scaring the women with the loss of that rifle,” he said.

“No, I was an ass—still, it’s an odd business. What do you want the pliers for?”

“An act of vandalism. Ever since I was a boy I seem to have been breaking up sixteenth-century relics.”

“You’re going to pull that cutlass to pieces?”

Vernon nodded.

“H’m. Though Lord knows what persuades me. I seem to remember reading somewhere that these old-time fellows sometimes hid important documents in the hilts of their weapons.”

Tommy’s eyes always sparkled at anything like that. They were glittering in the candlelight as Vernon took up the rusty old cutlass and examined it.

“You see, the blade passes right through the hilt and is riveted off in this rusty old boss. There’s a hollow space between the barrel and the socket.”

“By gad, yes! But d’you think the chap it belonged to was one of Winslowe’s men?”

“He may have been. In which case we shall probably find nothing. On the other hand, there’s a chance the earthquake threw up the body of John Trefusis.”

“That was the fellow he marooned on the island?”

Vernon nodded.

“Lord, what a thrill,” exclaimed Tommy, clasping his hands. “You are a provider, Winslowe.”

Vernon looked across the flickering candles at the gleaming face opposite.

“Tommy, has this show—this cruise come up to expectation?”

“Old man,” came the answer, “it’s been marvellous.”

“But suppose it all fizzles out in nothing?”

“It will still have been marvellous.”

“For you, perhaps.”

“For us all.”

“Not quite all,” said Vernon slowly. “If we fail, there’s one of us at least who will feel like a murderer.”

Tommy flushed angrily.

“I won’t hear you say that. D’you think I could ever forget the wonderful months of life you’ve given me?”

“Couldn’t you?”

And emphatically the answer came:

“No!”

“All right,” said Vernon, “don’t lose your temper. Get a towel and hang on to the blade and I’ll see if I can snap off this boss.”

The aged steel, brittled by years, broke with the report of a child’s pistol.

“Easy now how you draw out the socket.”

It came away with a half-twist and a little easing. After that it was simple to reduce the hilt to its component parts.

“Now,” said Vernon, taking the grip in his hand, “we shall see what we shall see.” He rapped it smartly on the table edge and from the cavity within a cylinder of parchment detached itself.

For a breathing-space the two men looked at one another. At last:

“Open it,” said Vernon.

Tommy shook his head and clicked a dry tongue against the roof of his mouth.

“No, you—your hands are steadier.”

And at that moment the flap of the tent was flung aside and Henry Julius, gasping and with a brow upon which the sweat stood out in beads, burst in.

“The map!” he cried. “Stolen! My tin box—where we put it for safety—burst open—and it’s gone.”

Vernon and Tommy came to their feet.

“Gone?”

Henry nodded and threw his beautiful hands over his head.

“Gone. I went to the box a minute ago for some medium I wanted. Hasn’t been opened for days—and then——”

No one had noticed the arrival of William Carpenter until his enormous shadow was cast against the walls of the tent. In his hand fluttered a sheet of white paper. His voice cut sharp and clear across the agitation of the moment.

“Marconigram from the *Mascot*—just taken it down.”

Vernon took the paper and read:

“ ‘Frank Sullivan not on board. A.A.A. Message ends.’ ”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

VERNON'S mind was occupied with too many other affairs for immediate speech. He was thinking of that strange dark object which he and Averil had seen in the water as the *Mascot* passed out through the heads, of the loss of his rifle and cartridges, the provisions, the map, and the mysterious figure that had not replied to Tommy's hail in the dusk. And at last, but not least, he was thinking of the crooked light which had showed for an instant in Frank Sullivan's eyes that day in his cabin. An armed menace had appeared among them; this easy picnic adventure upon which they had embarked had suddenly been transformed to one of danger.

It was Tommy Gates who broke the silence.

"Well," said he, "that explains a good many things. D'you think he means mischief?"

"If not mischief, then competition," said Vernon slowly, and added: "Probably both. I'd be a lot happier, though, if he hadn't got away with that rifle."

"But the map?" wailed Henry.

"We can afford the map. It hasn't been much use to us so far, and at any rate we know it by heart. It's the fellow being armed."

"We must round him up, that's all," from William.

"Not so easy. I'd guarantee to hide for a twelvemonth in this bush."

"But dash it," exclaimed Tommy Gates, "the fellow's civilized. He's not going to be such an ass as to shoot people."

"Let's hope you're right. After all, his quarrel is only with me, but there's a queer streak in Sullivan I don't like. I've met the type before; they behave very prettily while

the forces of law and order are about them, but there's no telling what they'll get up to when those forces are not there. Solitude and a grudge acts on that kind of temperament in funny ways."

"That's true enough," nodded Henry. "I've known a man shut himself away and pickle a little mole-hill of a grievance into a mountain. Chap I was thinking of was hanged for murder."

"What do you think brought him ashore?" asked Tommy. "Vengeance? Must have been a pretty hefty emotion to risk swimming in the lagoon with those sharks."

"Possibly vengeance, but probably greed," Vernon replied. "I don't imagine he'll do anything desperate as long as the treasure is unfound—but assuming we find it——"

He left the sentence expressively incomplete.

"Then what's our plan of campaign?"

"For the present I suggest we borrow a watchdog and go on as if nothing had happened."

"How about telling the women?"

William answered that question.

"There's not a woman here who hasn't every bit as much pluck as we men. I'm for telling them."

Vernon nodded.

"So am I."

"Carpenter's right," Julius assented. "After all, they should be put on their guard." Suddenly he sniggered. "I must tell Mary to carry that bag she put that fellow out with at the bull-fight."

It was good to have something to laugh about. Laughter relieved the situation of its tension.

"Shall we call 'em in?"

"Yes," said Vernon, "off you go, Tommy."

Mrs. Morgan was retiring for the night when summoned to Vernon's tent. She appeared in a dressing-gown made of some kind of bed-ticking. It was very voluminous and had had a toby frill at the neck. In a sense it helped the beholder to understand her trepidation as to her husband being brought too closely into the society of attractive females.

Her mouse-coloured hair was in papers. Mary Ottery, looking rather like Toots in Peter Pan, appeared in pyjamas and offered no apology for the immodesty of her attire. The others were clad in their ordinary clothes.

The little tent was crowded when Vernon made his announcement, and nothing could have exceeded the calmness with which the news was accepted. Mary Ottery borrowed a cigarette from Henry, and Kate Morgan remarked that it was a comfort to know that as Frank Sullivan was on the island there was no chance of his slitting poor Joshua's throat. That was all. Nobody was going to be frightened because a dog was snarling at their heels. Let him snarl.

"One thing is certain," said Kate. "I should never have slept a wink if I hadn't found out where that ham had gone."

Somehow their courage and equanimity put a lump in Vernon's throat.

"You're splendid, all of you," he said rather gulpily. "You've taken your powder like good 'uns, and now maybe there's a bit of jam to make up for it." He picked up the little scroll of parchment. "He and I," nodding to Tommy, have been fiddling about with that old cutlass and in the hilt we found this. Like as not, it won't help us much, but—— Who cares to open it? You?"

Averil took it tenderly as though at a clumsy pressure it might perish into dust. But the dead man had taken care to protect his message against the ravages of time. It was encased by a covering of skin, possibly the skin of a bird, which passed through the centre of the cylinder and was sewn at the edges. The age-old stitches snapped one by one at the touch of a finger-nail. The outer skin was peeled off and three minutes later everyone's head was craned over a curve of parchment held out beneath the flickering candles.

Then Averil drew breath and read:

"'I, John Trefusis——'"

The name was repeated like a whisper of wind stirring dead leaves.

“ ‘I, John Trefusis, of Polseth, Cornwall, write these lines of pardon for the pirate, Roger Winslowe, who left me marooned upon these shores in the year 1638, to perish miserably. It was said that treasure was hidden on the island, but whether this be true or was but told to mock me, I cannot say—nor have I ever sought to prove. Of what virtue is the treasure of riches to one removed from his fellows? But certain it is I found great treasure of another kind. I have found treasure in solitude and in reflection—in the company of bird and beast and the music of the insects and the sea. I have found the treasure of simplicity—of the power to forgive the wrongs done to me and of repentance for my own misdeeds. Thus I, who was left miserably to die, have instead received from this lonely island a treasure of health and happiness, great enough to fill my heart to overflowing, and to leave in it no corner for malice against any man.’ ”

Perhaps it was to hide emotions that Henry spoke. Certainly his eyes were strangely wet and he had blown his nose moistly after Averil finished reading.

“Ha—ha! Still, it doesn't help us much.”

“I think it does,” said Mary Ottery, and her voice rang.

“Yes,” came from Tommy. “Yes, by gad. A treasure of happiness and health, eh?”

Then Olive said:

“You brought us here,” and gripped Vernon by the hand.

The action was infectious—an idea which came to everyone alike. A moment later they were all holding hands in a circle, with the tent-pole as the axle of the wheel. Impossible to say what folks will do when they share a common emotion, but surely it will be something very simple. It was Kate who started singing “Auld Lang Syne.” Perhaps the circle of hands suggested it. The rest joined in and the neglected parchment of the happy John Trefusis curled itself up on the table like a dog before a fire.

Then something happened—a whine, a sliver of wood pecked as though by magic out of the tent-pole, a tiny star

peering through a sudden hole in the canvas, and from far away in the distance the pop of a rifle.

There was one man on the island who stood in the pathway of happiness.

That night a guard was mounted over the camp.

CHAPTER XL.

"DEAR EVERYBODY,

"For the next few days I shall be busy looking for the treasure. As I do not intend to be disturbed, I issue this warning that the whole island, except for a quarter of a mile radius round your camp, is placed out of bounds. I do not want to harm anybody, and you can feel perfectly safe as long as my instructions are obeyed. If, on the other hand, you are foolish enough to ignore them, you do so at your own risk. My shot last night was not fired in any spirit of malice, but merely as a reminder that I am here. Behave yourselves nicely and I shall not repeat the practice. I would hate to get on your nerves and have no wish to start a reign of terror. Later on I may have something to say to your gas-bag leader, but that must wait until more important affairs have been settled.

"Further instructions will be published from time to time.

"[Signed] FRANK SULLIVAN,

"Winner of the King's Prize at
Bisley, 1912-13."

This insolent message, which was tied to the stem of a palm-tree within a hundred paces of the camp, was discovered by Tommy Gates early the following morning as he and Olive were starting off for their day's work.

"For profound cheek," he exploded, "this takes the biscuit. Come on, Olive, we'll show him whether the island is out of bounds or not."

They only waited long enough to circulate the news among the rest of the company, then, with picks upon their shoulders, started off into the bush.

"One can't help smiling at that Bisley Prize stuff," said Henry, while collecting his sketching-materials. "Man must be an awful cad. Suppose he wears a marksman's badge on his dress-coat. Out of bounds, indeed! The idea of such a thing. Well, so long, everybody."

But before going Henry contrived to think of many means for preventing Mary leaving the camp that day.

“Terrible,” he said, “the way I wear my socks into holes—haven’t a decent pair left—not one.”

Mary’s silence was disappointing.

“What’s more,” he continued, “unless I give up a morning to washing some shirts and trousers, I won’t be fit to be seen.”

More silence.

“And I very particularly didn’t want to give up a morning just now,” he added, with a beseeching glance.

“I’ll wash your shirts and darn your socks,” said Mary. He brightened perceptibly.

“I’ll do them to-night.”

His face fell.

“Why not now?”

“Because,” said she, “if I shirked having my usual walk this morning, I could never hold up my head again.”

She was breathing through her nose as she said the words, and Henry, who had come to understand Mary Ottery, realized by the same token that further argument would be wasted.

“Suppose I were to lend you a gun?” he suggested. “A little beauty with a mother-o’-pearl handle?”

Mary debated the point in silence.

“Please, Mary.”

“A gun—a pistol—it would kill a man?”

“Dead as an ox.”

She looked at her hands. They were brown and hard, they had lost the feel of mittens. Suddenly she nodded.

“All right—I’ll take it.”

A moment later:

“Look out,” he cried, “it’s loaded.”

“Well, I should hope so,” said she.

She dropped the tiny automatic into a pocket of her coat and gave its hard contour a slap. Laughing a little to herself, she marched off along the beach.

“There goes a woman,” mused Henry Julius, “a woman

who would shoot a man if she believed the cause was just."

Curiously enough, the reflection gave him an extraordinary sense of personal security.

"I dare say she'd shoot me if she thought I deserved it."

Vernon did not talk of what he intended to do that morning.

"Everyone must act as they think fit," he said. "Though I confess I'd be happier if the women didn't go too far afield until we get some idea of this fellow's temper. It may all be bluff, of course; still——" His eyes rested anxiously on Averil. "We ought to avoid any chance of——"

He left the sentence unfinished.

A few minutes later he was examining the sand at the foot of the palm where Sullivan's message had been found. Footprints led away from the spot into the bush. Here they were lost, but broken twigs and flattened grass showed where a man had passed. Vernon followed these vague indications for a half-mile or more. Something bright which reflected the sunlight attracted his notice. He picked it up. It was an empty brass shell of a rifle cartridge. Evidently it was from here Sullivan had fired the shot. After that, though he searched diligently, Vernon could find no further traces. It was a hundred to one against stumbling on Sullivan's hiding-place without a clue, but that clue suddenly came to him through a natural cause. The sun was hot, he was thirsty, and had forgotten to bring a water-bottle. Water was the clue; a man who was hiding in the bush without proper equipment would choose a spot where there was water close at hand.

Once in the course of his wanderings Vernon had come upon a little spring not very far from where he was standing now. The water bubbled out of the rock into a kind of natural basin and disappeared again a few yards below. It was a wild, rocky spot, surrounded by trees and tangled undergrowth, an ideal hiding-place for a fugitive. There was no reason to suppose Sullivan knew anything about it; on the other hand, he had had many hours of freedom and was pretty certain to have spent them to advantage. The fact

that he had advertised his presence on the island argued that he had discovered what he thought was a safe retreat.

Vernon struck away to the left, and twenty minutes later was forcing a passage through the undergrowth. The sunlight dappled the tiny clearing where the water ran and a wisp of jewel-like birds glittered in the air. Vernon stood upright and looked about him. There was no evidence of human occupation. With a "Humph" of disappointment he threw himself on his face and took a long draught from the pool. As he was raising himself he saw the imprint of a man's fingers in the soft clay that margined it.

"Then I wasn't so far wrong, after all," he thought.

Skirting the pool, he began to poke about in the rocks and bushes on the far side. Then he laughed, for, neatly hidden under a screen of branches, was Lydia's blanket, a number of tins of meat, and the missing ham from Kate's storehouse. It was clearly evident this discovery could be turned to tactical advantage, and he was on the point of retreating with the object of returning later when a voice behind him rapped out the words:

"Hands up!"

Pivoting on his heels, Vernon looked down the barrel of his own rifle.

Frank Sullivan was standing on the far side of the pool.

"Hands up!" he repeated in a voice which trembled with anger. "D'you hear? Put 'em up."

"I hear," said Vernon, "but I'm damned if I'll put up my hands for you." And he sat down on a shelf of rock with a ten-foot drop behind him.

"Better be quick, old friend; I'll give you till I've counted ten."

"If I refuse to put 'em up for a rifle, hearing you count ten isn't likely to make me."

Frank Sullivan looked puzzled.

"What have you got?" he demanded. "Don't I look like business? Do you think I'm afraid to shoot?"

Vernon took a packet of cigarettes from his shirt pocket. It was risky, but he took the chance.

“Going to give me a match, or shall I use my own?”

“I think you’ll postpone that smoke.”

“I’m certain I shan’t.” He never even looked at Sullivan as he produced a match-box and struck a light.

“All right,” said Sullivan. “I can afford to wait.”

“That’s just where you’re wrong. You can’t. There’s only one thing you can afford to do, Sullivan, and that is make yourself scarce. I warned you on the yacht to keep out of trouble and you hadn’t the sense to take the warning. Well, I’ve looked you up to-day to repeat it. I’ve looked you up to tell you that we won’t stand for funny notices pinned to our trees, or for this Afghanistan border stuff at night. I’ve looked you up——”

“Looked me up!” cried Sullivan shrilly. “You liar! You tracked me here by a fluke, and if I hadn’t come along when I did you’d have sneaked off and fetched the others to ambush me.”

Vernon shook his head.

“Nonsense. I should have sat down and waited for you. It’s perfectly obvious someone had to come and tell you how to behave.”

Frank Sullivan fingered the trigger of the rifle lovingly.

“I put the island out of bounds,” he said. “Out of bounds, do you hear?”

“Do you know,” said Vernon slowly, “I sometimes think you must have a tile loose, Sullivan. No man in his senses could kid himself he’d be able to intimidate a whole crowd. Still, that doesn’t matter. The point is, this mad-dog business has got to stop. I shall take you down to the camp with me, where you’ll stop until I’ve arranged with some of the native boys to paddle you over to one of the adjoining islands.”

Frank Sullivan put back his head and laughed.

“Ho! you’ll do that, will you? Ain’t that sense of humour of yours getting the better of you? Ain’t you for-

getting which end of the rifle you're sitting at? Lord! Winslowe, I can enjoy a joke with any man, but sometimes it goes a bit too far—gets a bit too practical."

He was working himself up to something which approached hysterical fury. He was letting his anger outride his vigilance. Vernon's right hand had dropped to his side and his fingers closed upon a moss-covered boulder about the size of a boxing-glove.

"By God," cried Sullivan, "I think you're asking for a bullet through the knee-cap—through the knee-cap—hurts like ten thousand furies, old friend—nothing like it to bring a man to his senses."

"Sullivan," said Vernon, "if you talk like that I'll have you proscribed. Either you come down to the camp with me or I give orders that you're to be shot on sight like a dog."

Sullivan made no attempt to reply, but slowly brought the rifle to his shoulder and took aim.

Vernon saw how he drew breath before taking the first pressure on the trigger, the inevitable preliminary of any marksman.

At the sight he cried out:

"Let fly, William."

An ancient dodge, but it gave him a second's grace. Sullivan threw a quick glance behind him, and as he did so Vernon was on his feet and flung the boulder. As bad luck would have it, the sides were moist with moss; it slipped from his fingers and fell with a mighty splash into the pool, drenching Sullivan from head to foot and filling his eyes with unflung spray. The bullet which should have split his knee-cap splashed harmlessly into the ground. Vernon was on the rock now crouched for a spring, and as a second cartridge clashed into the breech he leaped far out over netted undergrowth, slithered down a ramp of loose stones, and, to an accompaniment of whining bullets, plunged into the protection of the bush.

"Blaze away," he cried. "There are only fifty cartridges, Sullivan; blaze 'em away."

The shooting stopped, and presently he heard a voice say very clearly:

“Honours to you, Winslowe; but wait till I begin to feel lonely, old friend—till I begin to feel lonely.”

Very cold and threatening sounded the words.

CHAPTER XLI.

“**Y**OU saw him?” said Averil. “You talked to him?”

Vernon nodded.

“For five minutes.”

“At the end of a rifle?”

Again he nodded.

“I don’t understand. Weren’t you afraid—or don’t you want to live?”

“Yes, I want to live—but I wasn’t afraid—at least, I don’t think so.”

“He might have shot you.”

“No. I knew pretty well he wouldn’t shoot until I meant him to. Men who’ve never committed a murder before aren’t generally in a great hurry to begin. Even in the war you saw that—two fellows holding each other up and not firing—never firing. I’ve known men throw away their weapons and go for each other with bare hands. There’s a—
—a nicety about these things.”

“A nicety—with him?”

“Yes, I know what you’re thinking.”

Averil seemed to be looking back at something which was past.

“I remember—when he and I were—were friends—that time you know—I’d see a streak in him sometimes—a yellow streak—not a bit normal. I was a fool then; I knew nothing and even found something attractive in that mood—strong. He’d say impossible things to people and look—oh! I can’t explain.”

“Crooked?”

She nodded her head quickly.

“Yes, almost mad—but with laughter to conceal it—to make you believe it was just his humour.”

“I’ve seen that mood too.”

“He would be terribly brave, too, in a stupid way. The maddest things. Once he jumped his mare over a perambulator with babies in it. Oh, awful! I blazed up at him and he laughed the temper out of me. I was furious with myself afterwards.” She gave a little shiver, and reverted to the present. “What did he say?”

“Nothing that mattered—except after I’d got away.”

“Yes?”

“‘Wait till I feel lonely.’ Queer sort of threat. I’ve been racking my brains what he could have meant.”

“‘Wait till I feel lonely,’” she repeated, and once again shivered. Then: “Are you going to wait?”

“No,” said Vernon. “No. I hate the job, but somehow I daren’t let that fellow roam about at large. We must hunt him up, I’m afraid. Tanyrate, he must be scared off this section of the island.”

But though they searched high and low and fired large tracts of the bush, not a sign of Frank Sullivan was found. He had vanished like a cloud, and as day succeeded day, and a week, a fortnight passed without further incident, the threat of his presence diminished, and the normal courses of their lives were resumed. Happiness picked up dropped stitches, and the shuttle of pleasant affairs slipped to and fro across the loom of their life.

But, strange as it must seem, Vernon did not rejoice in Frank Sullivan’s disappearance. With a tangible foe to fight there was no leisure for gloomy considerations. Thus the imminence of danger had in a sense been a joy to him. It is so much easier to walk with one’s life in one’s hands than with the responsibility of other people’s futures upon one’s shoulders. They had not advanced one step towards finding the treasure, and all the doubts and misgivings which had assailed him in the past came crowding back with club-footed tread.

And as hope cannot live in the company of despair,

Vernon lost all belief that the treasure would be found. There was so little money left, and because of that so little time. Of course they would find nothing; of course there would be no registered letter awaiting him at Honolulu; of course he would have to confess that the whole business had been started as a fraud. And that would mean good-bye to Averil, to his reputation, to anything and everything he held dear in life. A man was insane to believe there was a straight way out of a crooked deal. What was God's justice for save to confound such belief? Fool not to have driven Frank Sullivan to put a bullet through him.

He took to going out by himself, avoiding all company save his own. And they—his dupes—exalted him—talked of his bravery and resource—rejoiced in the knowledge that in him reposed the governance of their affairs—and they were happy, happy, happy. Almost he could curse their credulity, their unshakable trust. Fools. Why couldn't they see they had nailed their ensigns to a rotten mast which one day would snap and bring them fluttering to the muddy ground?

Then he would remember the faded words of happy John Trefusis; or the island would sing to him of its thousand other treasures; or some spark of youth and faith would re-ignite the dead embers of extinguished hope, and drive him back to the camp to hearten them with fresh excuses and inventions why they should believe the treasure would be found.

CHAPTER XLII.

MARY was walking fast, for her thoughts ran fast that morning, speeded by a tale of island devils which the old Kaifulu had told with more than his usual vigour.

In her hand was a scarlet flower gathered by the way. In a small clearing she came upon Henry Julius folding up his easel. A still wet sketch was leaning against his camp stool. It was a very bad sketch, and as a creator of works of art Henry was out of conceit with himself. Seeing in Mary an unexpected target for his woes, he greeted her enthusiastically.

“Hullo, you look very different this morning!” he exclaimed. Then, with appreciation of the cause: “Gracious! you’ve bobbed your hair.”

“I have.”

“Whatever made you do it?”

“I was tired of pins,” she replied gravely.

“Restraints?”

“Yes. Why shouldn’t my hair have a little freedom?”

“Why, indeed? It certainly becomes you.” He made a picture frame with his hands, and peered at her through it. “You know there’s something very strong and sweet about your face. If I were a real painter I’d like to catch you in that mood with the scarlet flower and the sunlight streaming through the trees.”

“Catch me?”

“Paint you.”

“Oh!”

“Curious thing a man’s development—the changes in him. I’ve always been an art-lover—always looked at nature in terms of art; it’s only lately I’ve acquired appreciation for the unpainted picture—if you understand me.”

“I think I do.”

“And the odd thing is it gives me just as much satisfaction as getting rich quick gave me in the old days.”

Mary smiled encouragingly. It was one of the nicest things she had ever heard him say.

“It’s a tremendous asset, you know,” he added. “Tremendous—to be able to carry in one’s head a sense of pictures. Free pictures, too, that you can shut your eyes and look at with your memory. I tell you the walls of my mind are as crowded with pictures as the Royal Academy used to be before the new hanging committee had a go at it.”

Mary laughed. She knew nothing of the old congestion, or of the new selection at the R.A., but she understood what Henry was driving at.

“There was a time,” he said, “when I resented the National Gallery being free, and that anyone could walk in out of the street without paying a cent, and find themselves before those great masterpieces. That resentment’s gone because I’ve come to see that the beautiful things in life are free.”

“Of course they are.”

“These sketches I paint mean nothing; they’re no more than tributes to a new state of mind. Look at this horrible daub I’ve made this morning.”

“If it’s so bad, why not tear it up?”

“My word!” he exclaimed admiringly. “That’s an idea. But it takes courage to destroy.”

“But you have courage.”

He tore the thick Whatman paper into small squares and scattered them.

“By George, I feel better for that,” said he, and looked at her with great curiosity.

“It would never have occurred to me to tear it up. And yet how simple. S’pose we could apply the same action to other mistakes one commits. Phew! that’s a notion. Terrific. But then, of course, we would want an overseer—someone to point out where the rubbish lay.”

“The bugle’s gone,” said Mary. “We shall be late for dinner.”

“Half a jiffy.” He bundled his sketching-materials into a knapsack, and slung it across his shoulder. They started off briskly.

“You must have had a very plain life, Mary.”

It was the first time he had used her Christian name, but she did not resent it.

“And haven’t you?”

“Mine’s been twopence coloured.” He hesitated and plucked up his courage. “What’s your intention if we find the treasure?”

“I shall travel—travel everywhere—keep on going about.”

“H’m! not a bad idea; but in a round world the further you go, the nearer it brings you home.”

“Home,” said Mary, “is a word that hasn’t much meaning for me.”

It shocked the traditions of his race to hear her say that; it hurt him for her sake. Of all the peoples of this earth a Jew is most faithful to the home idea.

“And supposing we don’t find a treasure?”

“I shall have found it in memories,” she answered. “What you said about pictures on the walls of your mind—well, in that way.”

“It’s good to think we’ve something in common, but I can’t bear the thought of you being a companion again—at least——”

“Yes.”

“Oh, I don’t know—just an idea I had—an alternative. P’r’aps you’d let me talk it over with you one day?”

“Of course.”

“It may be best to wait and see what turns up, especially if you’ve set your mind on travelling.”

“I don’t think it’s quite that. Only, if it’s possible, I want to escape knowing from day to day just what’s going to happen. I want to spend my life within reach of a surprise or two—something that has to be faced—difficulties.”

“Ye—es,” murmured Henry. “The notion I had in my mind might supply those requirements perhaps.”

And that was all he said about it, fearful, maybe, that

Mary might cause him to tear up a sketch plan which outlined her future as well as his.

They walked slowly, thoughtfully, sharing that silence which is composed of too many words for utterance. The soft, green carpet of growing things smothered the sound of their footsteps. In the distance sounded the notes of a bugle, the summons to the midday meal, but they did not quicken their pace. Then through a narrow aisle of trees they saw Tommy, his sleeves rolled up, digging furiously in the ground. Tommy was always digging. His belief was unshakable, his energy boundless. It was a case of ambition spurred by necessity. Any rock was a needle rock to Tommy Gates. Sometimes he would take a twig in his hands, and try and divine the treasure, wrest the secret of its hiding-place out of the warm earth by sheer concentration. Henry nodded in the direction of the boy.

“A lovely enthusiasm,” he said.

By common consent they stopped to watch. Tommy straightened his back and jerked the sweat out of his eyes. Then from close by a shot rang out. They heard Tommy exclaim: “Oh!” He rocked on his heels, then, as though tired of standing, sprawled on the ground, and lay there very still, with his face buried in the grass.

Neither Mary nor Henry moved. They stood like dead things in the silly postures of surprise. Another figure had appeared now—suddenly—unexpectedly. A man, tall, lithe, and with something animal in his tread. Sullivan! He trailed a rifle in his hand, from the muzzle of which issued a tiny curl of smoke. He moved to where the body lay, and turned it over with his foot. Across Tommy’s white forehead was a purple stain. Sullivan looked at it for a long, long while. He seemed hypnotized. His face was ashy white, and he was clicking a dry tongue. His eyes were ghastly. With a quick movement he clapped a hand over his mouth, and his shoulders heaved up and down spasmodically. He was fighting against an impulse to be sick. It was horrible! The rifle slipped from his grasp, and he leaned his head against a tree. Then, like a figure in a farce,

the dead body on the ground came to sudden life. It sat bolt upright, and exclaimed: "Oh—oh!" and the man who was trying not to be sick screamed something unintelligible, and made a dive for his rifle, and Mary Ottery walked forward and began to shoot.

"For God's sake, look out!" cried Henry. But she did not heed his warning. The little mother-o'-pearl automatic was streaming lead at Sullivan at an ever-diminishing range. Mary had one eye closed, and was taking trouble with her aim. At every shot she muttered: "He deserves it—he must die."

Frank Sullivan had got his rifle, and was tugging madly at the breech bolt.

Like a lunatic Henry was trying to unship his sketching-materials and get at his own pistol.

"He must die," said Mary, and fired the last round.

There was a loud squeal—a curse—and Frank Sullivan, leaping in the air like a Russian dancer, leaping and brandishing the rifle above his head, fled away in the direction of the camp.

Mary stood clicking the empty pistol, and wondering why it made no sound.

Altogether a queer business. No one seemed to know what to say or do next.

Henry held out his hand.

"Hadn't you better give that to me?" he said.

Mary shook her head blankly. She would not part with the pistol.

"I didn't kill him," she said, and sat down to cry in a lost sort of way.

Over and over again Tommy was repeating:

"I was standing there and then—what did happen—what did happen? I'm bleeding—look—look! I'm bleeding. What did happen?"

They could hear Frank Sullivan go roaring through the wood.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE camp was in an uproar when Tommy, supported by Mary and Henry, came stumbling through the gap in the palisade. Tommy was still a bit stunned, stupid from the bullet which had scored his forehead.

“If he hadn’t, just that moment, tossed the sweat out of his eyes, he’d have been a goner,” said Henry.

He repeated it several times, sandwiched between details of the affair and the amazing conduct of Mary.

“He’d have been a goner—and I couldn’t get my gun out. That Sullivan! Must have believed Tommy had found the treasure. Mad he was—then sick—and Mary walking towards him—shooting—shooting—like an executioner—I never saw such a thing. Marvellous! Hit him, too. Squeal! I can hear him now.”

Mary said nothing; she just sat there biting a finger-nail and eyeing a jug of water within reach of her hand but too remote for her energy. Vaguely she was wondering why she had never been taught to shoot.

Olive was busy with a bandage, walking round and round Tommy as if he might have been a maypole.

Then Vernon, scarlet from a burst of running, brought to camp by the crackle of distant shots, out of breath, bright-eyed and with nostrils distended at the smell of danger.

And the story was told all over again for his benefit, this time by several voices instead of one. Suddenly he interrupted to ask:

“Where’s Averil?”

She was not of the company.

“Ran out when the shots were fired,” from Lydia.

Then Henry:

“He came towards the camp, squealing like a mad thing—great bounds.”

Vernon caught William's eye.

“Just you,” he said.

They stopped long enough to collect rifles, that was all.

“Which way?”

Someone pointed. Side by side they raced out of the camp. A quarter of a mile away they stopped.

“Call her name.”

William's mighty voice raised distant echoes. They listened, and very clearly from somewhere down by the beach came the words:

“Don't follow me.”

The two men looked at one another dismayed.

“Don't follow me.”

“WHY NOT?”

A long silence, then another voice:

“I told you to wait till I was lonely.” Followed something that sounded like a laugh—obscenely inspired.

“Come on,” said Vernon, and made for the beach.

As they broke through the fringe of vegetation and coconut palms, a bullet pecked up the sand at their feet. Vernon jerked William back into shelter as a second whined past, head high.

“Steady, you fool—no good facing that.”

William's face was black with anger. It was the first time he had been shot over, and it took him that way. The war to him had been a distant affair of rumbling guns, muted by the buzzing of a telegraph instrument.

“But he's shooting at us—at me——”

A couple more bullets worried their way through the screen of bushes which protected the two men from view. Vernon lay down and, moving the tall grasses, peered out.

Sullivan was sitting on a rock two hundred yards away, gripping Averil's shoulders with his knees. It was obvious he was using her as a shield. From the straightness of her pose it seemed that her feet and wrists must be tied. Vernon knew it was impossible with safety to risk a shot, especially

with a rifle with which he was unfamiliar. They must wait developments. At the moment Sullivan held all the winning cards. There was not long to wait, for presently Sullivan rose, bringing Averil up with him in a single movement. Stooping, he slung her across his shoulder, and, keeping near to the sea, walked off briskly.

“Now’s our chance,” gasped William.

Vernon shook his head.

“With a hundred yards of sand to cover before we can reach him—not an earthly. He’d bag the pair of us before we’d covered ten paces. Keep low and follow—something’ll happen before long.”

He was right. Quite a variety of things happened. Sullivan capered, for instance—insanely—and once he stopped to put Averil down and kiss her before throwing her over his shoulder again.

Hearing Vernon groan, William felt he had been given the greatest confidence one man might share with another.

“Tell you what,” he whispered. “Let me race on and come out ahead of him. That way you might get a shot while he’s levelling up at me.”

Vernon shook his head.

“Thanks, no. My responsibility goes deep enough without that. We’ll stick together.”

For a full mile the slow pursuit proceeded, punctuated every now and then with little halts. Frank Sullivan appeared to be in no hurry. A change had come over him, and save for occasional capers he mouched along like a man with nothing else to do but kill time. He was too far off for the expression of his face to be visible, but once William drew Vernon’s attention to a spreading purple stain on the left shoulder of his shirt.

“Miss Ottery’s bullet!”

William Carpenter clung to polite prefixes even in moments of stress.

Vernon hardly seemed to notice. He could not understand why Averil was so passive, so inert. Never once had she shown the least rebellion. It was impossible for him

to have solved that subtle problem, for he had not seen Sullivan's eyes at close range and marked the demented animal light that burned in them. She told him afterwards it was not fear that gripped her, but a self-protective canniness, an inspiration that by her very passivity he would lose consciousness of her.

"He carried me as if I were a sack," she said, "and I don't think he even knew what he carried.

Mary's bullet, those weeks of solitude, disappointment, and that queer twist in his nature had dulled his realization of facts—and even his sense of touch. He was marching along oblivious of everything but a vague obsession of vengeance and a kind of protective strategy by which he kept a stretch of open sand between himself and a possible assault. It is doubtful whether he had any fixed idea what he intended to do next.

"All through that dreadful walk I am certain he was quite mad," she said. "Even his kisses were utterly without meaning, as if he was kissing me under compulsion."

Sometimes he talked to himself very loudly, bawling out words about hidden treasure and the map reference which had been given for finding it.

"I've been done—done!" he roared. Then: "Not yet, old friend."

And great cracks of laughter.

Quite mad!

After that another change seemed to come over him—his actions lost all appearance of purpose. Once he started to sing a snatch of song from an old musical comedy.

"I feel so lonely, lonely,
I want someone to love me only;
Some little, dear little miss
To squeeze and kiss——"

He broke off for lack of memory and screamed out like an angry child.

"This blasted shoulder! It hurts—hurts."

They came to a spot where the margin of the sea and the fringe of palms narrowed funnel-wise, and presently pursuer and pursued were moving side by side, separated by barely twenty paces. A little further on, a native canoe lay upon the sand, the incoming waves swilling gently against its prow. Sullivan looked sideways at the white, flitting shapes who moved beneath the palms.

"Go away," he shouted. "Off you go—don't want you." Then to Averil: "Tell 'em to go away."

Obediently she called:

"Go away."

No notice was taken.

Sullivan went on a little and stopped. They could see his face now, wrinkled in puzzled lines. The sun was beating down on his bare head, for he had lost his hat back in the clearing where Mary had fired at him.

"Don't they hear—why won't they go away?" There was a quality of tears in his voice—an almost pathetic impotence.

"Lord, the man's crazy!" gasped William.

Then Sullivan put Averil on the ground beside him, an arm around her waist, and said:

"I don't know what your name is, but you look a very nice girl. I feel so lonely. Would you like to sit on this canoe for a bit? Do you know I feel very lonely? Can't you walk? Look, your feet are tied up. I'll lift you, then."

The watchers could hear Averil reply: "Thank you." They saw Sullivan gently lift and seat her on the gunwale of the canoe beside him. The rifle was resting across his knees. His expression was blank and amiable.

"I've killed a lot of people to-day," he said. "Such a lot—quite a heap."

"Have you?" came softly.

"Oh, yes. Yes, rather. I wonder why. But never mind."

"Leave your rifle behind that tree," Vernon whispered. "Go on, man, don't ask questions."

Unarmed, he walked out into the sunlight, approached the canoe, and said in an easy tone:

“Hallo, Sullivan!”

There was a moment of terrible risk as a wave of half-recognition came and went. Sullivan raised his rifle, put it down again, and peered.

“Hallo!” Vernon repeated.

Sullivan seemed to be struggling with something but could not be sure what it was. Politeness—vengeance. Everything seemed to be jolly. At last he decided.

“Half a second. Yes, of course—met you out huntin’ years ago—Winslowe, isn’t it? How’s things?”

Afterwards Averil confessed she was more ashamed of herself for fainting at that moment than for anything else in life. It was an instance of relief being harder to bear than danger.

William Carpenter, obedient to an eyebrow order from Vernon, caught her as she fell and carried her into the shelter of the palms. Vernon did not move a muscle. Sullivan was smiling now and nodding his head in the direction William had taken.

“That fellow’s got a way with the girls.”

In the same language Vernon replied:

“Altogether too fresh.” Then: “Been shooting? Nice rifle.”

He put out his hand and took it. There was no opposition. With a few sharp movements he emptied the magazine and dropped the cartridges in his pocket. Sullivan encouraged him.

“Damn dangerous, rifles,” he said, “damn dangerous.”

“And now,” said Vernon briskly, “what about getting back to camp? Dare say you could do with a spot.”

It was the word “camp,” with its echo of the last talk they had together, which brought Sullivan to his senses—re-maddened him—what you will. The deadening effects of sun and solitude melted like a mist, and with a sudden snarl realization came rushing back. It all happened too quickly for Vernon to protect himself. He was dulled, off his guard by the easiness of success. Sullivan kicked him smashingly on the shin, and before he had recovered from the black and

starry agony the blade of a canoe paddle sent him spinning half senseless to the sand. When, a moment later, dazed and stupid, he raised himself on an elbow, things were happening in many directions. Sullivan had seized the canoe and was pushing it out to sea. Averil was running towards him, William Carpenter was rushing from palm to palm seeking the one where they had left their rifles. Failing to find them, he came bounding across the sand in pursuit of Sullivan. Vernon picked up Sullivan's rifle and snapped it uselessly. Then Averil cried out: "You can't shoot a madman."

The canoe was afloat by now with Sullivan aboard. Leaning over the stern, he struck out at William's head and the hand which had closed on the gunwale. William fell back, splashing and cursing. With a few quick strokes of the paddle the tiny craft shot out into deeper water.

"Come back," cried Vernon, "come back."

Soaking and scarlet of countenance from water, rage and mortification, William Carpenter came splashing up the shore. A dark fin appeared upon the surface, went sailing round the canoe and beneath it.

"Give me that rifle," said William.

"You can't," said Averil. "It would be too horrible."

The black fin reappeared ahead of the canoe, piloting it out of the bay.

Sullivan was shrieking vile epithets and working the paddle furiously. The watchers on the beach stood motionless. The canoe grew smaller and smaller.

Half a mile from the shore the track of a current curling like a snake towards the horizon greyed the water's surface. Presently the canoe was drawn into the current and possessed by it. They saw Sullivan, a tiny toy figure, battling to force it shoreward. The effort was useless. The canoe merely spun round and round and was drawn farther and farther away until at last it vanished over the rim of the sea.

"It would have been too horrible to shoot a madman," said Averil, in a dry voice, "and yet——"

She shuddered. She was thinking of alternatives.

“Come,” said Vernon gently.

“I say,” whispered William, “wouldn’t you two like to walk back together?”

“Thanks, old man,” said Vernon.

But he shook his head.

CHAPTER XLIV.

IT was a thoughtful and subdued party who sat round the camp fire that night. Their talk was inconsecutive, fragmentary, made up of half-phrases. They had been drawn very close together by a common danger, and it was difficult to realize the danger was over; they could not help thinking of what might have happened. Very little had separated them from tragedy.

“Makes one believe we’re under some protection,” muttered Henry, his eyes on Tommy’s bandage.

Then Kate, thinking no longer of Sullivan as of a menace to safety, but as some poor mother’s son:

“One can’t help pitying.”

And William—very human again:

“There was a gourd in that canoe. Somehow I hope there was water in it. I saw the gourd.”

And Mary, fingering a bitten nail:

“I hope that shot I fired——”

“You acted in the cause of justice, Mary.”

Her answer:

“Who am I?”

“We ought to be grateful, I suppose,” said Lydia. “What is it the Bible says, ‘The wicked shall perish’? It seems a bit of a shame they don’t get a second chance—when——”
Another unfinished sentence.

In the face of stern justice, resentment quickly turns to sympathy.

Only Olive Banbury was unchangingly severe. That could be understood.

“He got his deserts.”

Vernon rose very quickly and moved away. A second later Averil was by his side.

"Don't, dear," she said. "Please don't."

"That's all right," said he. "Only—rather a trying day, you know, and—deserts, eh! After all, why not? There's plenty to be thankful for."

He turned to join the others.

"You will be alone," she said reproachfully.

He muttered something she did not entirely hear.

"Must get into training," it sounded like.

A moment later William came pelting up with news that the *Mascot* would arrive about noon the day after to-morrow.

"Just in on the wireless."

"We'll have something to tell them, anyway," said Tommy, with a laugh.

For the next forty-eight hours great preparations were made against the return of the yacht. Everybody was involved doing something. Then on the morning of its expectation news came through that it would not reach the island before two or three o'clock.

Kate was in despair. She had tuned herself up to embrace Joshua at noon precisely, and further delay was almost more than her patience could endure. Throughout his absence she had been tormented with fears of ills that might have befallen him.

"I won't believe he's all right till the yacht comes in," she confessed.

"But it's absurd," said Averil. "Of course he's all right, and don't forget he'll be bringing letters from home."

Kate brightened perceptibly.

"Aye, that's so, and I'll hear about how our Annie has fared."

Lydia swallowed a mouthful of food to ask:

"Your first granddaughter, isn't it?"

"Grandson, if you please."

Lydia laughed.

"You seem very certain about it." She would have said more but that William's bare big toe torpedoed her shin under the trestle table.

“Our Annie knows what’s expected of her,” said Kate with proper dignity, and turned to upbraid Mary and Henry for being late.

Vernon was too excited to do more than pretend to eat. He made some excuse for slipping away.

“Dropped my watch up there,” he said, “and I’m lost without it. The rest of you will be down when the boat comes ashore. Say I’ll be along directly in case I’m late.”

He chose a path which led to the highest knoll in the island, where he sat upon a great wedge of rock and looked down over the tree-tops and the palm-tops at the lagoon below. There was in the scene a marvellous tranquillity, colour and sound merging with one another in the making of what at once was picture and harmony. The smooth feel in the air, the vast blue rotunda of sea and sky, the brush of the surf on the beach, the warm drone of insects and wanton patches of scarlet flowers together melted and mingled into a single entity. A verse of Stevenson’s flashed half-remembered, half-forgotten, across his mind:

“To make this earth our hermitage.”

Then a line he could not remember, and the final couplet:

“God’s bright and intricate device
Of days and seasons doth suffice.”

But did it suffice, or was all this beauty no more than a background to the ugly facts of every day?

Presently he saw the *Mascot* steam slowly into the lagoon, starting across the still surface two slants of golden ripples that stretched and widened until they lipped against the coral reef on either side. Though he started to his feet, Vernon did not dare go down to meet the little boat which, with Mr. Isinglass and Joshua Morgan aboard, was being rowed to the landing-place. He would have to choose a moment when the old man was alone to find out whether or no the registered letter had come. He lacked the courage

to face a negative shake of the head before the rest of the company.

A roar of welcome from William, reduced by distance to something less than the humming of a mosquito, came up to him. He saw hands stretched out to help Mr. Isinglass ashore—Mr. Isinglass in a black tail-coat and white duck-trousers and an absurd solar topee. He saw Joshua and his little fat wife lock and relock themselves in each other's arms, and almost could hear their breathlessness and feel their emotions. Then one of the sailors heaved a bag ashore which William took possession of with a familiar postal-service touch. Surely this was the mail. Yes, for a seal was broken at the neck of the bag and presently a heap of tiny white specks, like bits of confetti, was spilled upon the rocks, sorted over and distributed. After that there were people sitting down and heads bending forward and white sails spread that were newspapers. He could see them talking, laughing, passing letters to each other, and tossing them away. Those two so close together were the Morgans, who were fighting for a slip of paper and bumping their heads in eagerness to read it together. Suddenly they leapt up simultaneously, jubilantly. The white slip of paper was fluttering on high and a huge Midland voice broadcasted on so mighty a carrier wave of sound that all the Pacific might have heard:

“Twins—our Annie—twins!” And all else was in abeyance for a while until handshakes and back-slappings and words of congratulation were exhausted and old Joshua had been carried off by Kate to celebrate the occasion with a bottle of Bass which she had been cooling in the creek against his return.

From where Vernon sat it was like looking down upon happiness through the wrong end of a telescope. Infinitely far away and small it was—immeasurably remote from himself. He waited until one by one the tiny figures had drifted away—only Mr. Isinglass remained. When the last had vanished behind the palms that screened the shore, Mr. Isin-

glass scrambled to the top of a rock, and, standing erect, he beckoned. Impossible to define what instinctive knowledge caused him to act thus. Three times he beckoned, then he climbed off the rock again and, spreading out a coloured handkerchief, he put up his umbrella and sat down.

Vernon waited no longer. He took a straight line through the trees, and in three minutes he had reached the rocks.

Mr. Isinglass tilted back his umbrella and shot a glance at Vernon.

“So here you are,” he said. “I had begun to fear you had left us.”

“I wanted to find you alone.” Then, with overmastering impatience: “Have you got the letter?”

“Letter?”

“Yes, yes. I asked you to call for a letter at McAndrew’s.”

Mr. Isinglass thought for a moment, then nodded.

“I remember perfectly; but I thought it was a registered package you——”

“It’s all the same.”

“Is it? Hardly. A registered package might contain money.”

“It would have contained money.”

Very slowly Mr. Isinglass put down his umbrella and poked the ferrule into the sand.

“For God’s sake,” cried Vernon, “answer my question.”

“Mr. Isinglass lifted his eyes.

“In the name of honesty, Winslowe,” he demanded, “what do you want with money?”

Vernon’s hands fell to his sides.

“It hasn’t come.”

“What did you want with money?” the old man repeated. “You have been given faith, trust, love—what better service could money bring you than these? Winslowe, I talk to you now, not as to an angry man with a grievance against the world, but as to an honest man with a whole world of responsibility upon his shoulders. The problem of these people’s future is still unsolved and you ask for money

—and I ask what for. Is it that you may leave the problem unsolved—find for yourself a way of escape?”

“No, by God, no,” cried Vernon, and he was trembling with rage from head to foot.

“Then for what other reason?”

“Why should I explain my acts to you and say what I wanted the money for? If you care to think it was for myself, think it. My words won't alter your opinion. I tried to raise five thousand on a reversion, and I've failed. I was fool enough to hope I could repay the capital these people entrusted to me, and I've failed. But I don't fail alone, Isinglass. You dragooned me into this business, remember, backed up the lie I told, egged me on, made it possible. We go down together, you and I.”

The face of Mr. Isinglass was shining.

“I don't believe we shall go down,” he said, and quoted at memory: “‘There are some lies on which men mount as on bright wings towards heaven. There are some truths which bind men down to earth with leaden chains.’”

He fumbled in his pocket and drew forth a registered package and held it out.

“Yours. From the very first I've never doubted you; but in this I wanted to be very sure. Money sometimes—but no—never with an honest man. You forgive me?”

Vernon stood awhile without a word. Suddenly he thrust the registered package back into the old man's hand, saying:

“Take it. Be my banker, Mr. Isinglass.”

“Not this time,” came the answer.

For a moment it seemed Vernon might do anything—laugh—cry. He certainly felt very strange, his feet were light, and something had ceased troubling inside his head.

“But look here, I—look here, I——” he gasped.

“There, hop along and read it by yourself,” said Mr. Isinglass.

CHAPTER XLV.

CLUTCHING the letter against his side, Vernon Winslowe strode on and on. He would walk a mile, two miles, before seeing what it contained. Not from fear, but rather from gratitude, he delayed seizing the life-line that had been thrown to him. He was like a traveller within sight of an inn who slows his speed to better his thirst. He made a wide detour of the camp, swept over the rising ground, and came down into the tangled undergrowth on the far side. Thorns tore at his flesh and prickly vines trailed from his clothes, but they did not deter him; the quick physical pain they inflicted spurred him on. He had no goal save the limit of his own patience. He had waited so long and so hopelessly for this moment that, now it was at hand, he wilfully postponed it.

Presently the bush thinned to more open country, starred with flowers and bright with birds and butterflies. Through a natural avenue of trees he saw the rush-thatched huts of some of the islanders. Children were playing before the open dorways and old men were sitting in the sun. They were curious folk, these islanders, and Vernon knew if he were seen young and old would gambol up and amble up to have a look at him. Wherefore as quietly as possible he retreated by the way he had come until at last, in the shade and solitude of a big umbrella-like tree, he drew the letter from his pocket and broke the seal.

It was a long letter.

“My inclination,” it said, “when I got yours from Cadiz, was to take no notice. I had cut adrift from you that day at your flat. It took some doing, because in old days we were friends, and that kind of friendship sticks. Here’s what’s happened, then. I put your letter out of my head. You wouldn’t be advised or discouraged

before the thing began, so I saw no reason why you shouldn't stew in your own juice. I let three months go—then I knocked up against a fellow who gave me a few facts about the way you'd been treated by what he called 'the bunch at home.' He didn't tell the story sympathetically, but as though it were rather a sound joke which reflected glory on the chaps who separated you from your cash. Somehow that fellow made me angry—unreasonably angry—and I hit him. It happened in my own club, and he was my visitor, and, as you can guess, there was a devil of a row about it. That episode set me thinking that if an outsider could lose his temper plus his sense of what not to do in his own club for no better cause than a tone of voice, the treatment you met with might have supplied some excuse for going off the deep end and running amuck. 'Tany rate, I dug out your letter and pushed round to see what could be done about it. What I found out must be stale news to you by now, as I imagine old Fletcher Winslowe's lawyers will have cabled you that he died a few days after you left England. Apparently the monkey gland was a wash-out, for when I dropped round to look up the old boy I found he had been under the green sward at Finchley for about ten weeks. A few days later I fell in with a crony of his who said you were his sole legatee and would collect between twenty-five and thirty thousand pounds when everything was cleared up. I can't tell you, old chap, how glad I was, since it gave you the chance you were looking for—a way of cleaning up decently. Knowing what an age these lawyer blokes take proving wills, I'm whacking up our old friendship with a loan of five hundred in case there's a temporary shortage. I'm sorry I blackguarded you that morning, but I liked you more than a little, and, if it comes to that, I still do. It's queer, but I can't help believing there is a treasure in that island if only you could find it.

"Well, the very best to you. Tell me when you're back.

"RALPH."

He read the letter four times, then threw himself face down in the grass, and the troubled thoughts filtered out of him into the warm earth currents and relief filled in the empty spaces they had left behind. For half an hour he lay there utterly relaxed—dimly conscious of Fate's generosity and of nothing else, and while he lay, without a conscious mental effort, his plans for the future developed and ordered themselves and fell into appointed slots in his mind.

It was all beautifully clear when he rolled over and sat up, hugging his knees and staring out before him—marvellously clear. They had come to the island and had found the treasure. Yes, and it was old Roger Winslowe's treasure too, or at least the remnant which had passed down from generation to generation and had come to the hands of the last of the line in a lonely islet of the very seas where the treasure had been harvested. There was not a flaw in the argument—it was so simple as to solve itself. The old treasure was theirs to divide—the same treasure save that the currency had changed and the doubloons and golden moidores had, with the passing of time, been rehatched into Bank of England notes.

He did not stop to ask himself how the money should be split up; he only knew that he wanted none of it. He did not regard the inheritance as personal property. It belonged away from him, and there was not a thought of charity in his mind as he accepted this fact. What must be done was so perfectly obvious; the only thing that was not obvious was the method of doing it. His reward lay in relief, unspeakable relief and gratitude. By the grace of circumstance the chance had been given to him to expunge ugly scratches from a slate and start clean.

With glorious and overwhelming force came the thought of what, with Averil's help, might be mapped upon that slate for his future and hers. He must get to her at once—tell her everything—enlist her aid, and—— It seemed terrible that she was an hour's walk away. He wanted her beside him that very instant. He wanted—— But the detail of his wants was lost in the knowledge that the need for restraint which in the past had governed all his dealings with her had vanished. He could go to her now as a school-boy to his chum with marvellous news and marvellous hours of comradeship for the telling of it.

They must get away by themselves somewhere, somewhere absolutely alone. Then he thought of the yacht's dinghy and the great open sea it was the door to. There must be nothing ordinary, nothing casual or everyday about their

meeting. This was to be an hour that one day should be a memory. He jumped to his feet and started briskly down the hill. The village children ran out to meet him. They had flowers in their hair, and their little faces were flowering with smiles. From the doorway of his hut Kaifulu called a greeting, and Kaifulu's young wife dropped her eyes and fingered a little necklace of seed pearls at her throat. A slant of sunlight shining on the pearls started a thought in Vernon's head. He passed by, stopped, and came back.

CHAPTER XLVI.

BY the happiest chance Vernon found Averil alone. She was sitting on a rock within a hundred paces of where the dinghy was moored. It seemed she must have known he would seek her there, for as he approached she looked up with a welcoming smile, a smile which turned to puzzled amazement at the extraordinary change in him. Never before had she seen him swing along so gaily, planting his feet upon the ground as though he owned it. He broke into a run as he saw her, came up, and stopped breathlessly. His face was glowing with pleasure and excitement. All trace of those troubled lines at his eyes and mouth had vanished. She stared at him as at another man, a younger, better man, a man whom for long months she had searched for in vain.

Her question, "Something's happened?" sounded terribly banal.

He nodded vigorously.

"Yes, beyond belief."

"I'm so glad."

"I've looked for you everywhere. It's shot me up in the air, this thing—winded me. Let's get away by ourselves."

"You want to tell me?"

"Oh, Lord!" he replied.

It was the youngest thing he had ever said to her. One of those revealing things. She rose and stood by his side.

"I'm ready."

He pointed at the lagoon a few hundred yards away.

"The dinghy's down there—let's——"

"All right."

The fat little dinghy bobbed out into the lagoon, bouncing over the waves that warped its surface by the rift in the

coral reefs. The sea beyond was brushed by a steady breeze. Vernon socketed the mast, spread a small lugsail, and, taking the sheet in his hand, sat beside her. Even then they did not speak. On and on they sailed, with slaps of water clapping against the gunwale. The slant of wind tilting the boat more and more as they passed out of the shelter of the island brought them close together. Then his bare arm, resting on the tiller bar, touched hers, and she said:

“Tell me.”

From his breeches pocket he took Ralph's letter, and, turning to the middle page, pointed to the passage which told of his inheritance.

“Read that.”

She read it slowly, then, without lifting her head:

“Yes. Well?”

“Don't you see what it means to me? Don't you realize the amazing mercy of it?”

“To you,” she repeated, still looking away.

“Yes. Averil, haven't you grasped it? It's a way out. Averil, aren't you glad?” In his enthusiasm he gripped her hand. She drew it away sharply and faced him.

“No. Why should I be glad? You say there's something wonderful you want to tell me, and it boils down to a bit of money—the same as last time; it was money then. A way out, you say—yes, it's a way out for you, I suppose—a money way. Oh! it seems to me that you can only be miserable and only be glad for money's sake.”

He was looking at her stonily. Far away on the horizon a black whorl of cloud, the shape of a sand-glass, spun upward into the sky. The sail flopped as the wind emptied out of it; the boat ran forward a few yards, steadied, and lay motionless in a treacherous calm.

“I'm sorry. Perhaps it's unjust to say that, but money and no more than money seems such a wretched thing to share. I'm glad that you will be able to—to get yourself out safely.”

The fault was his. It had seemed so obvious the money was not intended for him—too obvious to abuse her intuition

by saying so. He had assumed she would have thought the best of him, but instead—— Well, she had justice in thinking the worst. Love may be blind—not so intelligence. The magic hour he had planned was not for him; the joy they might have shared was shattered by misunderstanding. There was nothing to be said. He got to his feet, lowered the sail, unstepped the mast, and taking the oars, brought the dinghy round toward the shore with powerful, savage strokes. The storm cloud in the east had risen higher and was swelling visibly. Huge and menacing, it swept towards them a giant in copper armour and a purple cloak.

Vernon had not seen it, had not noticed how the sunlight winced at its approach. Her words had dulled all but his personal senses. He was terribly, bitterly wounded. Impotent anger checked the impulse to put himself right with her—anger and a hard pride which drew the blood from his face and set it in the mould of a man who is suddenly ill. With a queer recognition of a quality of pain that sometimes comes to a man, he remembered an incident of many years before when, as a small boy at a prep. school, he had been accused and caned for a fault he had not committed. The same old hard pride had kept him silent under the cane. He had denied the offence, and had suffered the more severely on that account. That was bad enough, but what was worse was the rankling impotence of being up against something too big for his strength to compass. He would have given anything to have been able to row with his back to Averil, while the pattern of these thoughts was revealed in the twitching of muscles at the corners of his mouth and the dull red of his temples. Though he did not meet her steady gaze, he knew her eyes were upon him, weighing up his misery or even, perhaps, rejoicing in what she must have felt was the justice of it. The silence was so complete that all the little noises, the dipping of oars, the clucking of water along the gunwale, sounded big. She had not taken her eyes from his face since he began to row. She watched him perplexed, wondering, and slowly enlightened. She would have spoken then were it not that her sudden

failure in intuition had ungoverned her power to say the right thing. Then suddenly: "I'm so ashamed," she cried.

He looked up to see her filmed with thin gold from the melting sunlight, luminous against a great wall of banked-up clouds.

"No, don't speak; let me show I've some understanding. That money—it wasn't for you—you never thought of it for yourself—you were going to give it all up—it was for those others—treasure you'd found for them."

All he could do was nod. But the illness had gone out of his face. He was still red, but not with anger—a kind of abashed red. He looked like a schoolboy, awkward at having been apprehended in an act of unlooked-for generosity—fearful of praise, yet glowing at the thought of having well earned it.

She put out her hands to him, and he had to get rid of the oars to take them, and laughed at his clumsiness in doing so.

"Can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive—it was my fault," he said. "I——" But he didn't want to talk about that. There were better things. "I spent a bit of the money—only a bit—I just had to. Don't know if it was wrong—didn't stop to think. It's in the pocket of the jacket you're sitting on—the right pocket—or left, perhaps. Um! in that little wooden box. It's for you. Chuck 'em away if you'd rather. You see, I shan't touch another penny but this—— Averil, it's been terrible loving you as I have and never saying so."

The little necklace of island pearls trickled through her fingers, hanging from the last, and shining simply against the angry threat of the sky.

"For me?"

He nodded.

"I stole them for you, I suppose—but somehow I can't make myself mind."

Neither, it seemed, could she, for she lowered her head for him to fasten the clasp. Then they looked at one another—breathed—and he said:

“The future’s safe—now.”

Up above them two huge masses of clouds met and battled for the high road of the air. Regiments of storm troops that frothed and writhed in spinning whirls of black and white.

“Averil,” he said, “I want to kiss you more than anything else in the world, but until I can come and say it’s all splendidly over—it’s all—— Oh, you know what I’m driving at.”

“I know what you’re driving at,” she answered.

He threw up his head and stretched out his arms.

“I’m a boy again,” he cried.

Then the rain fell—straight—grey—obliterating. Then a scurry of wind, whipping the sea to white spume and flattening it as with a mighty iron. Then great jags of lightning cracking in the air like pistol-shots, and the split and rumble and roar of the thunder.

CHAPTER XLVII.

PUFFING from the exertion of the climb, Mr. Isinglass reached the spot where Vernon had looked down on the arrival of the *Mascot*. It was the first time he had ventured so far inland, and the heat that precluded the storm, plus the steep ascent, exhausted him. He sat down on a patch of grass and slowly recovered his breath before attempting to inspect the surroundings. The first thing he noticed was the dinghy, a tiny white speck in the open sea; the second was the vanguard of the storm, and the third the huge wedge of rock upon which Vernon had been sitting. He examined these three objects in turn. At the first he remarked, "Well, well"; at the second, "Hullo"; and at the third he whistled. Indeed, the third interested him to such an extent that he continued to look at it and continued whistling as he looked. The rock lay at a slant, the wide butt of the wedge was flush with a circular bed of rock, but there was, however, a pointed end which was clear of the ground by two or three feet. Mr. Isinglass got up and walked round it twice. The result convinced him that the position of the rock was perfectly normal, that it had neither been moved to its present position nor at any other time could have been standing vertically. This was proved by the fact that the bed upon which it lay was an integral with the rock itself. True, the rock bore no resemblance to a needle, but there was this virtue to his discovery, it was situated in a prominent part of the island, it possessed a point, and the point, in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun, cast a substantial shadow. Mathematics were never a strong suit with Mr. Isinglass; he succeeded, however, in making a rough guess where the point of the shadow would fall at noontide, and, having done so, marked the place with a bread pill pressed into the rough

surface of the bed-rock. Having no compass in his possession, he took out his watch and laid it over the bread pill. Years before, someone had shown him how to find out the points of the compass through the agency of sun and time. Although Mr. Isinglass could never accomplish this feat without considerable difficulty, it was one of which he was inordinately proud. Having collected his thoughts, he set to work, and ten minutes later was satisfied that he had succeeded in locating the north. As an actual matter of fact, he had missed his reckoning by several degrees.

Laying a twig on the ground to act as a finger-post for future operation, he produced a penknife which boasted in one of its metal sides a four-inch rule.

“Now,” said he, “a pace is thirty inches, and the map said fifteen paces due north, three west and under. Let’s see where that will bring us.”

Accordingly he cut a cane, measured and marked thirty inches upon it, and cut it again to that exact length.

While so doing, he became aware of the rapid approach of the storm.

“Bless me, I must hurry, or I shall lose the sun.”

With all dispatch he busied himself measuring up the fifteen paces to the north. He needed the sun’s rays to help him find the west. It had not occurred to him that this could be done by taking an angle of ninety degrees from the line he had drawn to the north. Persons who occupy their minds with the affairs of men and women are often incorrigibly stupid in the simplest mathematical problem. Brave as a lion in face of human emergency, Mr. Isinglass could not approach the thought of long division without trembling. His attempt to find the west before the storm put out the sun’s eye was a pathetic example of earnest but inaccurate endeavour. The only relief to an otherwise painful situation lay in his complete assurance that, although hurried, he had not allowed himself to be misled. The three paces took him to the edge of a five-foot drop, at the bottom of which was a disorder of ferns and rocks.

With great agility and no small personal risk he scrambled

down, and was delighted to find that the earth beneath was soft and friable.

“It’s a gift,” he remarked, as he dug his fingers into the soil. “It’s a gift. All I have to do is invent some nonsense about that needle rock, and the trick’s done.”

He was laughing and chuckling when the first blast of wind and deluge of rain smote him.

“God bless me,” he cried with sudden memory. “Now I wonder who was in that dinghy. God bless me, we don’t want a tragedy at this stage.”

Heedless of angry elements and the infirmities of age, he made for the beach at a run. As he came through the final fringe of palms he saw William Carpenter and Tommy Gates racing up the coral reef, their drenched shirts flattened against them by the wind.

Seeing the old man, they stopped, and, coming back, seized him by the arms and bore him along between them.

“They’re in the dinghy—Winslowe and Miss Chester,” gasped William. “Out there they are! Hidden by the rain, but the lightning—there.”

As he spoke there was a blinding flash, and by its light they saw the dinghy bucketing shoreward in the trough of the waves beyond the line of creaming surf.

Vernon and Averil were huddled together in the stern. The wind, which at the beginning of the storm had blown indifferently from any quarter, was now roaring down upon the island from the nor’-east. To row in such a gale was impossible, and, taking a chance, Vernon had hoisted the little jibsail. Even with so small a surface of canvas the dinghy was lying over at an acute angle and, like a fast motor-boat, was cutting a swath of water as she leapt along.

“God,” said William, “they’re done for. They’ll never find the opening in this gale.” He released his hold upon Mr. Isinglass and, tearing off his shirt as he ran, raced up the coral reef to the gap. Whipped by the wind’s fury, the surf had spread across it—leaping, churning breakers that reformed into waves as they entered the lagoon, and swept over its surface in vast, diminishing corrugations.

“Here, here!” roared William, his arms above his head and the shirt flying. Impossible to say whether or no they heard or saw, but as the dinghy came level with the mouth of the lagoon Vernon put his helm hard down. What followed was terrible for the watchers. The tiny boat straightened up, then heeled over nearly flat upon the water. They saw Vernon seize Averil, and throw their mutual weight backward. It was a forlorn hope, but luck was with them, and half full of water, the dinghy righted herself, was snatched at by the wind, and came leaping over the triple bars of surf into the relative calm of the lagoon.

William could stand no more. With a wild halloo he went into the sea head first, and in a dozen mighty strokes had gripped the dinghy’s gunwale. Presumably he imagined he would find its occupants too exhausted and helpless to bring the boat ashore. What he saw gave him the greatest surprise of his life. The man and the girl were looking at each other with faces which glowed with happiness and content. What he heard seemed to have no conceivable relation to the ordeal through which they had passed.

Vernon was saying:

“I love you—I love you—I love you.”

“D’you want any help?” gasped William.

But the roar of the tempest was too great perhaps to allow them to hear. Marvelling greatly, William Carpenter released his hold, and swam silently to the shore.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THAT night there was a jamboree at which everyone went quite crazy. The storm had swept on and away, and the great blue bowl of night tinkled with little metal stars. A concert was given. There were many reasons for this celebration—chief among them Vernon's and Averil's delivery from the terror of the deep. Then, again, William had made the startling announcement that he was going to marry Lydia—a fact which he had not thought fit to communicate to her either in terms of enlightenment or of proposal. He had been fired perhaps by what he overheard in the boat, coupled with the fact that he had seen Lydia destroy, unread, a batch of letters from home, presumably relating to a past that no longer interested her. Among the destroyed correspondence were a number of dressmakers' catalogues, which hitherto had provided Lydia with her chief article of literature. Taking these matters into consideration, William, with brutal frankness, said: "We're going to get married," and he accompanied the statement with a glare at the woman of his choice that boded her ill should she deny it. But Lydia did not deny it; instead she ran her fingers through his hair and tugged it, and said:

"That's right, old man."

As Mary wrote in an odd page of her diary: "She seemed to be hanging on to him with both hands."

There were two reasons why the Morgans desired to celebrate. First, there was their reunion after a separation of nearly a month; second, the glorious tidings that their Annie had at a single coup presented them with two grandsons. Joshua, in a speech of characteristic length, dealt with this supreme feat of maternity, largely attributing it to the fact

he and Kate had come to the South Seas. He admitted that in many ways the trip was not all a man of his years could ask for, but if it had done nothing else it had cured a rather misplaced ambition "on part of old woman and self to go trapesing."

"All that talk about an honeymoon," he went on, "works out as being no more than talk. She's satisfied with me and me with her, and always have been. We are a couple of fools to fancy we could go off spooning at our time of lives. Fools we was if no worse, taking into consideration that we was potential grandparents."

At this point Kate interrupted the proceedings by drawing attention to the fact that Joshua's nose needed attention, and by offering her handkerchief for the service. Joshua slapped her away and proceeded:

"With young folk it's different. They must travel far to find out where they belong; but old folks know, or should know, where they belong, and that place is before their own hearthstones, where old woman has rocked cradle and old man has warmed his feet and warmed his beer. Well, we've had trip and we've had lesson, and we've got the treasure of a future generation to look forward to."

"I wish to heaven you wouldn't talk as if it were all over, though," said Tommy, when the clappings and beatings had subsided.

"As to that," Joshua replied, "I may have a word to say in a day or so. But one thing's certain, us can't stay here poking about under rocks for a lifetime."

It was rather an unhappy conclusion to an otherwise popular speech, sounding as it did a note of failure on an occasion of rejoicing. Feeling this to be the case, Mary Ottery made the surprising suggestion that she should sing, and, without waiting for assent or denial, she stood up in their midst with her hands behind her back like a properly behaved school-child, and sang the old song: "I shot an arrow into the air." She made no effort to impart the smallest dramatic force to her rendering. Like a trusting linnet she opened her throat and sang. When they cried for more, she

gave them "Cherry Ripe" and "Rocked in the cradle of the deep," and, lastly, a hymn, because her repertoire was exhausted. And everything she sang sounded as innocent as water—a breeze—or a bird.

When she had finished, Lydia put her arms round Mary's neck and hugged her, and said:

"You brave darling."

And perhaps it was the bravest thing Mary had ever done, because the distance between being a companion and being an entertainer is enormous.

After that, Henry fished out a banjo and the men kicked up a frightful row, losing the original melody of every tune through persistent ambition to sing seconds. In the midst of the pandemonium Mr. Isinglass plucked at Vernon's sleeve and whispered:

"Have you ever noticed how rapidly the last few grains of sand fall through the hour-glass, hastening their own end, as it were?"

And Vernon replied:

"I know, but it doesn't matter now—the end is safe. I want to talk to you."

"Not to-night. I'm tired. To-morrow at ten o'clock—up there." And he pointed at the black silhouette of the hill-top. "At ten—not earlier. I'm going to slip away now."

But before he went he looked at everyone in turn, then stooped to whisper:

"Take your mind back a few months, Winslowe. The same circle of faces, a few months ago—that night in the restaurant."

"I know."

"Can you wonder, then, that never for an instant I doubted there was treasure on the island? Good night!"

Silently he melted away into the shadows. Henry Julius was tearing at the strings of his banjo, and in a stentorian voice William roared:

"Motherland—motherland,
See thy sons at thy right hand."

“Mother,” said Joshua, his head on Kate’s fat shoulder, “are ye ready for home, mother?”

She nodded, then a doubt assailed her.

“Aye! but there’s these boys and girls, Josh.”

“I was thinking,” he replied, “when I was over there in Honolulu—thinking there might be grand possibilities of opening an island branch of our business—and if that were done, well, one’d have to have someone to run it and——”

“Ee, Josh!” said Kate, and clung to him for very pride.

“Now don’t excite yourself,” said he.

But they talked over the project long after everyone else was asleep—everyone, that is, except Mr. Isinglass, who all night long was toiling up the hill carrying bags that jingled, and returning with them empty to the beach. On the last journey of all he bore upon his back an old box strapped with brass, beneath the weight of which his knees bent almost to the ground.

CHAPTER XLIX.

“I ’M bound to make a hash of the thing,” said Henry Julius; “that’s a certainty, but I’d like to have a shot at it all the same. Just as you were last night—singing—with nothing beyond but the blue sky.”

“But it was night,” said Mary.

“M’yes, but one can’t paint at night—at least, I can’t; besides, I want that innocent blue—the purity note.”

“Very well.”

She finished her breakfast quickly and joined him.

“I shall never be able to sit for more than ten minutes, though. I’ve lost the knack of keeping still.”

“Ten minutes’ll do; I haven’t the craft which keeps a man from getting stale at a long stretch.”

Together they mounted toward the higher ground.

“Starts a thought, that does,” said Henry, after a ruminative silence. “A thought on constancy. One ought to be able to say I’ll be this or that—I’ll do this or that indefinitely. See what I mean?—apart from moods and impulses, to know our own power and be able to govern it. If we can hold down a thought, an ability—what you like—for ten minutes, one ought to be able to go on holding it down for good. That’s always been the trouble with me—bright flashes—I’ve never learnt to burn steadily.”

They reached a clearing in the thicket just below the high rock, and not more than a dozen yards from the spot where Mr. Isinglass had buried the treasure.

“Here, I thought, where the shade falls, for me,” said Henry, “and you over there. I won’t be a minute fixing up.” He unstraddled his easel, and squeezed some dabs of colour on a folding palette.

“Now Winslowe is the type of man that I admire—the solid purpose of him. He’s got character and sticking-plaster too. I was amusing myself the other day analysing his character against mine, the service mind against the opportunist. I can’t say the result was altogether flattering to myself.”

Mary smiled.

“I mean that. Look at it this way. Heaps of times in my life I’ve been tricky—in and out quick with a profit gained at the cost of a loss in credit. Yes, I’ve done things to be ashamed of—and, what’s more, I have been ashamed of them too. But I’ve never gone back to the people I diddled and said: ‘Look here, this wasn’t altogether a straight deal.’ Instead I made guarantees with myself that I wouldn’t behave in the same way again. I’ve left old scores outstanding to settle themselves, if you see what I mean. Now Winslowe isn’t like that. If Winslowe cut the cloth he wouldn’t slip away and pretend someone else had done it; he’d call the marker, own up, and pay for a new one.”

“I think he would,” said Mary.

“And that’s why,” said Henry Julius, filberting his paint brushes with wet lips, “that’s why I admire him, and if ever I got a chance of doing him a good turn I’d take it.”

He squinnied his eyes at Mary, and made a gesture that she should raise her chin.

“That’s fine. Hold it now; breathe through your mouth. Splendid!”

Inspiration had descended upon him that morning, and the sketch he dashed up, viewed by comparison, showed a marked advance in skill and understanding.

“I must move,” she said at last.

“All right—p’r’aps you’ll come back later on. No, don’t look at it—not yet at least.”

Mary wandered away, while Henry, head down over his palette and wholly absorbed, set about the terrific undertaking of mixing an “innocent blue.”

The remarkable discovery that the colour he sought could

be obtained by a small speck of Indian red worked into a mass of flake-white and cerulean blue released his consciousness to more everyday affairs, and presently he became aware of voices on the other side of a separating screen of bushes. At first he was too wrapt up in his work to pay heed to what was said, but a few words louder than the rest brought up his head sharply and quickened his hearing.

The words were spoken by Vernon Winslowe in a voice Henry had never heard him use before.

“Ever since I launched the swindle, I’ve racked my brains for a way out. And now I’ve got it.”

He did not speak like a man who was contrite, but rather as one charged with excitement.

“Swindle”—“a way out.” Henry stiffened and, putting down his palette and brushes, edged a little nearer. Next came the thin bird-like tones of Mr. Isinglass.

“Since we approach the end, Winslowe, let us have the story from its beginning.”

“You know the beginning well enough.”

“Does she?”

Then Averil’s voice:

“He told me everything last night.”

“Then tell it to me,” said Mr. Isinglass. “For although you may not credit it, all I knew of you when I determined to take a hand in this adventure was that you were a retired naval officer with a pretty good war record at the back of you.”

“I would have thought,” said Vernon, “my conduct as a civilian would have helped you to forget that.”

“On the contrary, it urged me to remember it. You were angry, and angry people are seldom responsible for their words and deeds.”

“That’s true,” said Averil, “as I know.”

Mr. Isinglass went on evenly.

“After all, anger taken in relation to the rest of a man’s life occupies a small proportion of time. I think sometimes we are given our tempers to make mistakes with, and our characters repair the mistakes we have made. Come on,

Winslowe—from the beginning, then we can come to the solution in due course.’’

So rather haltingly Vernon related the chain of circumstances that led him to his present predicament. He concealed nothing either in his favour or against it.

When he told how he had forged the entry in the old map, Mr. Isinglass started violently.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed. “Surely you don’t mean you invented those words about the treasure?”

“I wrote them in.”

Mr. Isinglass removed his hat and wiped his forehead.

“Oh, dear me,” he muttered. “Oh, Winslowe, but this makes it terribly difficult—it means there is no treasure.”

Henry Julius, concealed behind the screen of bushes, bit his short moustache, and shut and opened his hands, which were sticky with perspiration.

“No treasure,” the old man went on; “but I had set my heart on there being one. And the map reference was all lies?”

“For practical purposes, yes.”

Mr. Isinglass took his head in his hands and moaned very much as a child might have done who had been told that the institution of Christmas and birthdays was to be abolished.

Then came Averil’s voice, clear, cool and incisive.

“That’s not quite true.”

“Averil, I asked you not to mention what——”

“I know, but I’m going to.” And, regardless of protest, she told what they had found in the log-book that day at Cadiz.

The effect of this information upon Mr. Isinglass was astonishing. Peering through the leaves, Henry saw the old gentleman rise to his feet and execute a *danse de joie* upon the grass. When he had satisfied his need to celebrate, he breathlessly returned to his seat on the rock.

“I tell you what we’ll do, Winslowe,” he said. “We’ll go down to the yacht and crack a bottle of Pommery. I’ve never been so pleased about anything in my life.”

Vernon looked at Averil.

“You see what you’ve done?”

“I don’t care,” she replied; “it’s true; it was in the log-book.”

He shook his head.

“Haven’t we inspired enough false hopes without starting a fresh one?”

“Well, well, well, Winslowe, what do you suggest?”

“I come to you for suggestions; my imagination has run dry.”

“Ah, that five thousand pounds?”

“It isn’t five thousand—it’s thirty thousand.”

And in a few words he told the amazing news of his inheritance.”

“H’m!” said Mr. Isinglass gravely. “And you propose to pool that sum to the common advantage?”

“Yes. I leave myself out, of course.”

Mr. Isinglass repeated the exclamation “H’m!” and added: “Odd young man.” After that he fell into a reverie. His next remark was surprising.

“Eight into thirty—three thousand, seven hundred and fifty pounds apiece. A nice little bit.” He whisked his head round and looked at Averil. “What are you going to do with your share?”

She flushed hotly.

“That’s rather unkind, isn’t it? Obviously I couldn’t take a share.”

“How’s that?”

“Well——”

“Pride?”

“We’re friends, he and I—it would be unthinkable to——”

“Come to that, we’re all friends, Miss Averil.”

“I know, but——”

Then from Vernon:

“You’d have to take your share.”

“How could I?” said she.

“Well, if you refuse,” said Mr. Isinglass, “I don’t see

very well how I can accept. Then of course some of the others may refuse and——”

“But you must invent a way by which they will accept.”

“My dear Winslowe, I’m not a magician, and do you know, I think I should be very sorry to use what powers I may possess in persuading folks for whom I have a boundless respect to take a gratuity.”

“That isn’t fair,” said Vernon. “I’ve cheated them and I’ve a right to repay.”

“Yes, but it’s a simpler proposition to rob than to repay—what you suggest is very quixotic and very creditable to yourself—but I don’t see how you can treat this business as though it were a kind of children’s country holiday fund.”

Averil came over and put a hand in Vernon’s.

“That’s what I felt; but I couldn’t hurt you last night by saying so.”

“You see, Winslowe,” Mr. Isinglass went on, “your whole premise is wrong. You can’t in one breath expose yourself as a blackguard and in the next as a benefactor.”

“Yes, but——” Vernon began. “But don’t you see?”

“I’m afraid I don’t.”

“The money was Roger Winslowe’s just as surely as the treasure would have been.”

Mr. Isinglass shook his head.

“It’s too far-fetched.”

Vernon’s face was drawn with pain.

“God, it’s awful,” he said, “if I can’t—if there isn’t any way. Did I inherit this money just to mock me? Look here, I shall force them to take it—I shall chuck it on the beach and leave it there.”

“If you omitted to mention the fact beforehand, you might do worse than that,” said Mr. Isinglass, with a twinkle.

Vernon got up and gripped him by the arm.

“Are you going to help me?”

“To the best of my ability, of course, but I am more than ever convinced that the only solution to the puzzle lies in finding the treasure.”

Vernon looked at him hopelessly and jerked back his head.

“If that’s so,” he answered bitterly, “we may as well throw in our hands straight away.”

Then he stopped and added:

“After all, you made a mistake not to let me——”

It was because of Averil he did not finish the sentence. But the unspoken words started a new train of thought in his head. There was a way out, after all—a sure way by which no one could refuse to accept his money. Some hint of the thought must have revealed itself in his face or Mr. Isinglass had an uncanny gift for reading other men’s minds. Taking the lapel of Vernon’s coat, he drew his head down and whispered:

“Quick thinking, Winslowe.”

Vernon started.

“How do you mean?”

“Pff, you can’t hide your thoughts from me. I’ve seen that expression on your face before.”

“I don’t understand.”

“A pistol shot in the dawn, eh? A letter in your breast pocket: ‘I will and bequeath my entire estate real and personal to——’ then a list of eight names.”

“Well, if all else fails, why not?”

Mr. Isinglass smiled and shook his head.

“I do admire your sincerity,” said he, “but you’re a clumsy thinker, Winslowe. Besides, all else hasn’t failed—yet. Give me an hour to think things over—I’ve a solid belief that something always turns up.” Then in a louder voice: “Take him away for an hour, Miss Averil.”

Then, as they were turning to go:

“Aren’t you proud of him? I am,” said Mr. Isinglass. They left him seated on the rock.

CHAPTER L.

HENRY JULIUS took off his hat and wiped his brow. His eyes were wide open and his mouth sticky and parched. His first conscious desire on recovering from his surprise was for a drink. Among his painting-materials was a little tin bottle. He unscrewed the cap and raised it to his lips, only to be reminded that he was painting in oils that morning and that the bottle contained medium and not water. The ridiculous aspect of this performance, even though it failed to quench his thirst, did something to restore his normal frame of mind.

He sat down on the grass and collected his thoughts. Presently he said:

“My stars, it’s amazing.”

To realize the significance of this remark, it should be said that his amazement was not so much inspired by having discovered the swindle as by having heard a man’s voice wrung with misery at being unable to find a way of making a gift of his entire fortune to a company of men and women with whom he had only recently become acquainted. He appreciated well enough why Vernon had started the swindle—it was a natural outcome of ill usage received at the hands of others—but the suicidal quixotism he now revealed defeated him altogether.

“I was right in my estimate of him, though,” he muttered. “The poor fellow must have suffered.”

Not in a single respect had Vernon’s stock depreciated from Henry’s valuation. If anything, it had improved. But he wished above all things he had not overheard the conversation—or had had the decency to slip away at the outset. He disliked himself for eavesdropping, and even the knowledge that his presence was accidental failed to re-

store his good opinion of himself. And so there was no treasure, and he, a shrewd business man with a wide knowledge of the pitfalls which beset the feet of investors, had allowed himself to be trapped. Here was a thought which rankled until it was followed by consciousness of what he would have missed had not Fate brought him to the island.

No treasure! Which meant that instead there was a tragedy. Dimly he began to understand how Vernon felt about it all. The tragedy of failure. A sudden memory came to mind of that little company he had floated before he left England, the company for the future success of which he was not so sanguine as to consider it advisable to stay at home.

"I wish I'd never launched the thing," he muttered, for there had arisen in his imagination a picture of Tommy Gates' face when he should hear the truth, and from that it was not difficult to imagine other faces, unknown to him, who would be wearing similar expressions as a result of his financial shrewdness.

"One thing is obvious," he argued. "I mustn't know anything about this business."

Acting on this intention, he packed up his sketching-materials and tiptoed away into the bush. Arrived there, he retraced his steps and mounted to the rock, whistling as he walked.

"Hallo," was his guileless greeting when he saw Mr. Isinglass. "Fancy you being here."

Mr. Isinglass, who had moved into the shade, smiled a greeting and patted the grass at his side.

"If you're not in too great a hurry."

Henry unshipped his painting-gear and sat down.

"I'd enjoy a breather, and a chat with you is always pleasant."

"H'm! Nice of you."

"Been taking a little walk, sir?"

"Did you think I came on the wings of Chance?"

"It wouldn't surprise me."

Mr. Isinglass chuckled.

“Well, p'r'aps I did. I've been thinking, Julius——”

“Yes?”

“That it's about time we found that treasure, and really, you know, some of you are unaccountably lazy.”

Henry Julius assented with a nod.

“There's something in the air,” he said, “that——”

Mr. Isinglass shook his head.

“Oh, I dare say. And I observe that everyone is very happy. But it occurs to me that in their happiness they aren't being quite fair to Winslowe—to our leader.”

“Not fair?”

“Um—um! It's a big responsibility to take people on a treasure hunt and find nothing. You see yourself what a painful position it puts him in?”

“Yes—I hadn't thought of that—but quite so.”

“So, as I look at it, everyone's obligation is to help—if not for their own sakes, then for his. You may say that with a good many of us there is no real excuse for scrabbling in the earth for a few pieces of gold—that many of us have already found a treasure out here in various other ways.”

“I think we have, Mr. Isinglass.”

“Yes, but that isn't quite the point. We should never forget that we owe our presence here to the idea of a material treasure. Therefore, no effort should be spared to prove that Winslowe did not bring us on a wildgoose chase.”

“That's all very well,” Henry assented dubiously, “but what's to be done?”

“The answer is simple. Find the treasure.”

Henry laughed.

“The answer may be simple, but the finding isn't so easy. Suppose, for example, there is no treasure?”

“I decline to suppose anything of the kind. Why should I?”

“We haven't even found the needle rock yet.”

Mr. Isinglass flicked a bread pill into the air. The talk had taken the turn he was waiting for.

“Let's put our heads together, Julius. Let's do a little theorizing. Do you, as a business man, imagine an old

scallywag like Roger Winslowe would have written a plain statement of where he had buried his fortune?"

"We've the proof he did."

"Ah, the map—the log-cabin—needle rock, meridian, and all that! Yes, but has anyone found a rock that looked like a needle?"

"That's been the trouble."

Mr. Isinglass leant forward mysteriously.

"Perhaps it was meant to be. Now, what does the word 'needle' suggest to you?"

Henry made a thoughtful face.

"I suppose a sharp rock pointing upwards—Cleopatra's needle—a thing women use."

"But Roger Winslowe was neither a woman nor an Egyptian queen. What was he?"

"By all accounts he was a bit of a scoundrel."

"Just so—a scoundrel—a pirate—a seafaring man. Is a seafaring man going to look for adjectives in a lady's work-basket?"

"I don't—how do you mean?"

"It strikes me as being far more likely he would choose them from articles of his own trade. Look up the word 'needle' in a dictionary and you will find it has several applications. A geologist might use it to define an aciform crystal; a builder speaks of a temporary wooden support as a needle."

"Does he, indeed?"

"But we are dealing with a man of the seas—a mariner—so these applications of the word may be dismissed."

Henry nodded and dismissed them with a gesture.

"What remains?"

"I really couldn't say."

"No, but I could. You may accuse my solution of being far-fetched, but it's worthy of consideration."

"Well?"

"A mariner's compass. The movable bar—the pointer of a mariner's compass is called a needle. Did you know that?"

Henry leaned back with real admiration.

“That’s damn smart.”

“Ah, it appeals to you. Assume we take it to have been the needle of a compass to which Roger referred, to what conclusion does that lead us?”

Henry Julius shut his eyes and screwed up his face. At last:

“I’ve got it,” he cried. “A rock which points horizontally—not vertically.”

“Julius,” said Mr. Isinglass, “you are a man of vision,” and in his excitement he took a great piece of bread from his pocket and began to work on the largest pill he had ever made.

“Exactly, Julius, horizontally—horizontally. In fact,” he added in an exultant tone, “just such a rock as the one that faces us now.”

Henry opened his eyes and stared.

“Good Lord,” he exclaimed. “Good Lord.”

Black against the sky was the great wedge of rock, its point casting a shadow upon the bed across which it lay.

“Good Lord. Is it possible, I wonder?”

Something new had come into his face. Something strangely unlike the expression he had worn half an hour earlier when he was painting Mary Ottery.

Mr. Isinglass, who passed nothing by, marked it with melancholy disapproval.

“And we may be sitting within a few rods of a fortune.”

He rose to his feet and stood biting a finger-nail.

“Have you tested the theory, Mr. Isinglass, worked out the formula for finding the treasure given in the map?”

Mr. Isinglass shook his head.

“Not I,” he replied. “The notion has just come to me. There are probably a hundred similar formations of rock on the island. This one was merely convenient to illustrate my theory.”

There was a quality of deliberate innocence in his voice that sounded a note of sharp familiarity in the ears of Henry Julius. Thus in the past—lightly and in terms of disparage-

ment—had many men talked to him to conceal eagerness to achieve an object. Even in moments of excitement or emergency, Henry Julius did not forget the lessons he had learnt in the hard school of life. The deliberate innocence of Mr. Isinglass instantly awoke in him a sense of caution which he took good care to conceal.

“As you say,” he retorted, “probably there are hundreds. I can think of a dozen myself. After all, the whole idea is a bit fantastic.” He glanced at his watch. The time was half-past eleven.

“To be sure,” said Mr. Isinglass, rising and brushing the grass from his trousers. “At best, theorists are dangerous folk to put faith in.”

“Just so. Just so.”

With the most casual air in the world, Henry strolled to the rock head down and attention riveted on the point of shadow it cast. Something attracted his eye, and under cover of tucking in a shoe-lace he stooped and picked it up. It was the bread pill Mr. Isinglass had pressed into the rock bed the day before. The shadow of the point had not yet reached the spot to which it had adhered. Possibly within half an hour it would do so. Henry Julius was wondering about many things when Mr. Isinglass spoke.

“I think I’ll be moving down to the beach now. It’s a trifle hot up here. You will stay and make a sketch, I suppose?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Good-bye, then.”

“Oh, by the way,” Henry called after him, “have you mentioned this idea of yours to anyone else?”

“Not a soul. I hardly thought it worth while. False hopes, you know.”

“But you thought it worth while to tell me.”

“I saw no harm in it. You’re a business man.”

“Just so. But you didn’t think it worth while to dip a spade and see what turned up?”

“I’m not much of a digger.”

“No.” It was all very puzzling. Henry shot a glance at

Mr. Isinglass, who seemed rather nervous; his forefinger and thumb were revolving very fast one against the other. The action gave Henry an idea.

“You must have made a tremendous lot of bread pills in your time, Mr. Isinglass. The marvel is what becomes of them all.”

“I hadn’t thought of that—but I dare say you’re right.”

“No, you hadn’t thought of it,” Henry repeated, “but you should think—men give themselves away by trifles, you know.”

“Eh?”

“Queer your having told me and no one else.”

“About my pills?”

“About this rock.”

“You happened to come along.”

“Yes, and I happen to be a business man, and you happen to be going away and leaving me—a business man—alone with the possibility of finding a great fortune.”

Mr. Isinglass said nothing. He was watching Henry’s face closely.

“Did it ever occur to you, Mr. Isinglass, that I might be a bit of an opportunist, that I might not be the ideal man to leave alone with, say, a bag of diamonds that hadn’t been counted and didn’t belong to anyone in particular?”

“If the cases are parallel, surely my present action proves that I think you are the ideal man.”

“H’m!” said Henry Julius. “That’s a neat answer. Surprising, too. Were you really going down to the beach?”

“I was.”

“Not to some spot behind these bushes where you could see without being seen?”

“I was not.”

His next shot was very direct.

“I suppose there’s no doubt about the treasure being there, Mr. Isinglass?”

“That remains to be proved.”

Henry Julius thought for a while before answering.

“Then, by your leave, we’ll delay proving it until a few more witnesses are present.”

“Julius,” said Mr. Isinglass slowly, “I wish I were a younger man.”

“Eh! Why?”

“Because then I should ask you to knock me down.”

“Good Lord!” Henry ejaculated, with a half-laugh. “I don’t blame you for ringing a coin on the counter. If I hadn’t found that bread pill sticking to the rock, I might never have tumbled that you were trying me out—and if I hadn’t—well, who knows——?”

“That’s honesty run riot,” whooped Mr. Isinglass. “Let’s be thorough schoolboys and shake hands.”

They did, and afterwards Henry made a characteristic remark.

“I wish Mary had seen us doing that and knew why.”

It is a strange reflection that through his business sense a man may find a pathway to his soul.

“As it approaches noon,” said Mr. Isinglass, glancing at his watch, “I think we will postpone our descent to the beach and follow up our theory straight away. Run down to the camp, Julius, and let’s get the folks together. A pick-and-shovel parade up here—at once.”

Henry Julius made off at a run.

CHAPTER LI.

AVERIL and Vernon were talking together when Mary came upon them.

“Hallo,” she said. “Not working this morning?”
“No,” Vernon replied. “We were theorizing for a change. Disgraceful, isn’t it?”

“I expect it will do you good. You’ve both been working too hard lately. I mustn’t stop. Good-bye.”

“Where are you going in such a hurry?” Averil asked.

“I’m supposed to be sitting for my portrait. I left Henry to put in the background. He’s up there by the big rock.”

“Up where?”

Mary pointed.

“The studio is just below the table top. We had our first sitting an hour ago.”

Vernon and Averil exchanged glances.

“An hour ago—and you left him there?”

“Yes—absorbed.”

Then Vernon said:

“Was there anyone else by the big rock?”

“No.”

“Not Mr. Isinglass and——”

“No, I should have heard if he’d been there. There was no one when I came away. Did you want him? If you like, I’ll ask if Henry has seen him and give you a shout.”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Vernon. “Any time’ll do.”

“I must run. Good-bye.”

They waited until she was out of sight, then turned and looked at one another.

“He would have heard,” said Averil slowly.

“Bound to.”

“Oh!”

“Look here, don’t take it like that. I don’t know why, but I’m glad he heard. It simplifies the business. Now there’s nothing left to do but face the cards.”

“Then you think he’ll tell?”

“Honestly I don’t know. He’s a shrewd man; he might even try and turn his knowledge to account. No, that’s unfair, and at any rate it’s not the point. The telling is up to me now, and the sooner it’s over, the better.”

“I shan’t stop you,” she said.

“Then let’s get down to the camp. They’ll be along for dinner directly—couldn’t find a better moment.”

“You won’t see Mr. Isinglass first?”

“No.”

Now that the end was in sight, he seemed strangely unconcerned, as though by the very determination to expose himself a weight had been lifted from his mind.

“I never was much of a hand at bottling things up,” he said in answer to a query in her eyes, “and these last months I’ve done nothing else. I dare say it’s been a healthy lesson, but waiting for a thing is the worst part. Are you coming?”

“Do you want me to come?”

“It’d be easier if you stayed away. I don’t know, though—everyone ought to be there. Yes, you’d better come. But first let’s shake hands and say good-bye.”

“Didn’t I tell you——” she began, but he stopped her with:

“I know you did, but I answered that, Averil—besides, after it’s all over I shall—well, it’s no good talking about that. Young Rogers will take command of the *Mascot*. He’s a good chap and a decent navigator. Let’s shake hands and say good-bye.”

“You won’t come back to England?”

“Well, hardly. I don’t imagine anyone would ask me to do that. It would put rather a severe strain on tolerance, wouldn’t it?”

“You accept the idea of saying good-bye very easily.”

It took all his strength to reply in an everyday voice:

“There’s no alternative. After all, we’re two people

who've met and liked and—I'm fatalist enough to believe our ways separate here."

Then Averil said:

"I fell in love with you the first day I saw you."

"Are you going to shake hands?" he asked.

"No," she answered. "No—no—no."

In silence they walked to the camp and found it deserted. There were signs that its occupants had left in a hurry—a pot was boiling over—a half-peeled potato and a knife lay on the ground—one of the benches was overturned. From the high ground above came the shouts and halloos and the notes of a bugle.

"H'm!" said Vernon. "He hasn't lost much time."

CHAPTER LII.

THERE was something infectious in the way Henry Julius sounded the rally. In the past he had earned notoriety as an inspirer of confidence—*vide* his successes as a company-promoter; this day his methods were less professional if more thrilling. He had dashed into the camp and roared:

“Boys, picks and shovels!”

Having seized a foot rule and a compass from a table in his tent, he dashed off again with the young and healthy ones after him. Even Mrs. Morgan, a wooden kitchen-spoon in her hand, joined breathlessly in the chase with that curious rolling gait peculiar to old ladies in pursuit of trams.

Arrived at the hill-top, Henry was besieged by eager questioners.

“Don’t crowd round me,” he implored. “Give a man a chance. Where’s Winslowe?”

Lydia, as bugler, was told off to sound the rally.

“What’s all the excitement?” said Mary, who had just arrived.

“Mr. Julius has an idea, that’s all,” returned Mr. Isinglass. “An idea that the needle might refer to the needle of a compass.”

“He thought of it,” Henry threw over his shoulder. “Here, get out of the light, William.”

Then William Carpenter, who had suddenly realized what the excitement was all about, delivered himself of a rock-echoing roar.

“What’s the time?” someone shouted.

Mr. Isinglass, a repeater to his ear, answered:

“Twelve o’clock.”

“Stand away there,” cried Henry, and, lying flat on his

face, he placed the compass on the point of the shadow. "The damn needle won't keep still. That's better. A pick, Tommy. The shaft, man." Some manœuvring—then: "There you are—there's the north."

Vernon and Averil arrived as a chorus of voices shouted.

"Fifteen paces due north."

No one seemed to notice their arrival, though for the moment he thought the shout was to deride him. Then his eyes met Henry's, Henry who was searching his pockets for the foot rule.

"Have you told them?" he demanded.

"Shut up!" came the answer. "Shut up, you fool; can't you see what's happening?"

"No, I——"

Everyone was talking excitedly—much too excitedly for anyone to listen.

"Shut up, can't you?"

Averil's fingers closed on Vernon's arm as he was about to reply.

"Not now," she implored.

"Yes, but——"

"Not now."

Tommy was pointing at the rock and yelling.

"Needle-rock—needle of a compass, Winslowe—look!"

"That damn foot rule—dropped it somewhere," from Henry Julius.

A germ of the general excitement suddenly infected Vernon.

"Good God!" he said, "it can't——"

He whipped from his pocket a tape-measure in a leather case, and, springing forward, shouldered Henry out of the way.

"Got your north? Yes, that's good enough. Here, hold this ring."

There was a scramble, in which William was victorious, for the honour of holding the ring at the end of the measure. Henry had to satisfy himself by reducing fifteen paces to a common measurement.

“Thirty feet, nine inches.”

“Take a sight along the compass needle, William, to be sure the line’s straight.”

Mr. Isinglass had scrambled to the top of the rock, where he sat hugging his knees and looking down at the workers beneath.

Vernon had begun to walk backwards, unwinding the tape as he went.

“Cut down this cane, Tommy, she throws us out of line.”

What was that? The forehead of Mr. Isinglass creased into puzzled wrinkles. The line he had followed had met with no interference—it had cleared that cane by two feet or more.

The temporary obstacle was removed.

“Thirty feet nine inches, you said?”

“Yes.”

“Good enough. That’s here. Sure I’m straight, William?”

William, with one eye closed:

“A speck more to your left.”

“So?”

“So.”

“Chuck us a bit of wood.”

Vernon caught a gold pencil thrown by Henry and drove its point into the ground.

“Three north—that’s ninety——”

“Seven foot six.”

Henry’s ready reckonings were a tremendous asset; he could keep his head for figures in any emergency.

“Compass,” said Vernon.

No one spoke while he steadied the compass to find the west. The silence, after the babel of tongues which preceded it, was almost painful. The men’s hearts could be seen beating under their shirts. Olive Banbury had a hand to her throat because it had begun to ache. Lydia was stifling an emotional upheaval with tight-closed lips. She knew if she opened them she would laugh, and once she laughed there would be no stopping it. Mary was stroking her knee as

though it were a cat. Averil was staring at Vernon, amazed at the steadiness of his hands.

Mrs. Morgan, although she did not know it, was digging into the sandy earth with her wooden spoon and throwing it all over her husband, who was unconscious of everything. It is an unnerving business to find oneself within seven feet six inches of a fortune.

At length, in an unnaturally calm voice, Vernon said: "That should do."

He dropped the ring over the embedded pencil and walked away with the tape and stopped. Where the measure was marked seven feet six inches took him to the centre of a piece of moss-covered rock about the size of a paving-stone.

Mr. Isinglass had kept his eyes closed for the last two minutes; he opened them as Vernon said: "Here!" He opened, then he closed them again, and his face went grey with pain. That none might see the agony he suffered, he slipped from the rock and, going round to the far side, laid his head against it. The place where the compass and the tape had led Vernon was at least a dozen feet from where he had buried his treasure. The generous deception he had designed to put a crown to their endeavours was wasted—lost. His plans had come to nothing—they were muddled and destroyed by his own carelessness. It would be hopeless now to reveal his hiding-place without arousing suspicions. It had been such a charming dream. For weeks and months he had looked forward to this day of happy awakening—content in the belief that no one would ever realize the source from which their treasures had flowed. But, instead, they would dig in the ground and, finding nothing, a man would be broken—lovers would divide—a boy would die—and disillusionment and distrust and resentment would rust the gains that had been made. Crashing into his thoughts came the first blow of a pick, but, before a second was struck, Tommy's voice:

"Hold on a second before we take the plunge. Just in case, Winslowe—in case it's all a wash-out—treasure here or not, we're damn grateful to you."

Then from Lydia:

“And so say all of us.”

And then the clink of metal against rock—the tearing of roots as the big stone was levered up—the thud as it toppled over sideways—the scoop of spades and the plop-plop and rustle of earth tossed aside.

CHAPTER LIII.

Thus wrote Mary Ottery:

“I think what pleased me most was the way Henry came over to me when first the treasure was found and said: ‘You get your wish, Mary. You’ll be able to travel now.’ It was strange he should have thought of that before all else; but, then, everything that morning was strange. We thought it would be an old box we should find buried, and we could hardly believe our eyes when the treasure, all mixed with sand and earth and the roots of flowers, came up in spadefuls and was scattered at our feet. It was like a bran dip at a children’s party except that the laughter was missing. I don’t think anyone was even excited, for somehow feelings had gone beyond excitement—numbed would describe them better. It was terribly solemn, like a miracle, and it grew more and more solemn as the pile of gold coins and jewellery mounted up to a heap. Until somebody laughed, no one thought of speaking. It was Olive who laughed, and she told me afterwards it was because he was out of danger. She meant Mr. Gates, of course. I think I laughed too, or felt I should, but that was because all those riches made me feel so small and stupid, and I had to do something to get back to my own size again. Besides which, Henry had stooped to rescue his gold pencil, which seemed funny to me. It was all too big for ordinary people—much too easy, and for that reason very difficult. I remember seeing Captain Winslowe when the first spadeful came up. I never saw a man look so white. He made a kind of hopeless gesture, and Averil came and took his hand and smiled, and big tears were running down her cheeks, and catchily she said over and over again: ‘It’s all right—all right.’ Then Mr. Isinglass joined them, walking on tiptoe as people do when someone is ill in a house. He didn’t speak, but just looked at Captain Winslowe and shook his head. They looked so funny standing there shaking their heads at one another. They reminded me of the china mandarins on Miss Hornby’s mantelpiece who would nod and nod

for the littlest causes—a draught or banging of a distant door. And presently Mr. Isinglass tiptoed away again, and I saw him spread out a coloured handkerchief and go down on his knees with his eyes shut and his lips moving. Then Captain Winslowe said: ‘I feel extraordinarily queer. I think I’m going to——’ It was Henry who stopped him from falling and who made a knee for his head to rest against and who fanned him with a branch of fern and who said: ‘Give him air,’ as though someone would run and fetch a little. I never saw Henry nicer than he was then. He was like a very nice nurse, and when Captain Winslowe opened his eyes and said: ‘I was a fool to do that,’ Henry gave him a kind of hug and said: ‘That’s all right, old man—you had a bad spell, but you’re out of the wood now.’ Then, for some reason I couldn’t understand, he laid a finger on his lips and nodded reassuringly, and although doing that didn’t mean anything to me, Captain Winslowe seemed pleased and said huskily: ‘I expect you’re right, Julius.’ I do like Henry, because somehow he seems to see a little farther than most people.”

Thus she wrote that night by a flickering candle in her tent. She would have written more had not Henry Julius called her away for clerical duties in connexion with the accountancy of the fortune. A syndicate composed of Joshua, Henry and Tommy had been formed to arrange and classify the treasure and arrive at an approximate valuation. It was a tremendous undertaking in which Vernon refused to take part.

“You’ll do much better without me,” he insisted.

“Well, one thing is certain,” said Joshua; “when it comes to the divide, it’s you who should have lion’s share.”

They were astonished at the violence of his reply:

“If there’s any question of that—if there’s another word suggesting anything of the kind, I swear I’ll chuck the whole boiling lot into the lagoon.”

“A very proper sentiment, too,” ejaculated Henry Julius, his fingers flicking like a bank cashier’s among the aged coins. “Here, Tommy, you’re collecting the doubloons. Lord! how it’s all mixed up.”

Averil and Vernon passed out of the circle of light into the darkness of the woods. With everything to say, they

could find no words to make a beginning. In the really great joys and crises of life, one seeks a great expression often to find it in silence. At last Averil said:

“What’s wrong with being ordinary and just saying anything to each other?”

“I was thinking,” he answered, “how crazy life is when its whole course can be turned topsyturvy by a bit of luck.”

“You mean if we hadn’t found the treasure you’d have——”

“Yes—but I’m just the same man. I don’t love you differently—and yet I feel I may love you now. It’s so crazy—I’m not a bit better—worse, probably, because in justice to everyone I mustn’t tell them the whole thing was a fluke, must I?”

“It would be wicked——”

“Yes, I believe it would. So there it stands, and here am I trashier than before, but with everything chucked into my lap. Luck—just luck has pulled me through, and not a sacrifice made and nothing owed to myself. It’s all too easy, so easy I almost funk asking for more.”

He meant that too, and they walked on side by side in silence. Perhaps it was Luck who had unbarred the root of a tree to make a trip-wire for Averil’s feet. She stumbled, and he caught her, and, being in his arms, he could not let her go.

And after that there were no more puzzles, worries and misgiving; everything was clear, simple, sufficient and explained. They awoke out of that moment like children on the first morning of a holiday, opening eyes upon unfamiliar trees beyond an unfamiliar window to the scent and the voices of a farm-yard, to a slant of white sunlight pitching a pattern of diamond panes across a time-scarred floor. To the immeasurable possibilities the future held they awoke, and in the clean joy of awakening, being unable to speak, like children they took hands and ran, running, as it were, to leave plain memories behind. Away through the palms, across the beach, leaping over pools and splashing through the ripples that swilled across the sand. It was terrific, mag-

nificent, idiotic. They ran too fast for care to cling to them—care, which has no taste for the company of love and laughter, fell away grumbling as they sped. Then she broke from him, crying:

“To the treasure rock,” and started off afresh up the twisting path to the hill-top. But they could not reach it at so high a speed. Gasping and breathless, they fell to a walk, a walk that dawdled to a wander, until when at last they came to the high plateau it seemed they were moving but little faster than shadows cast by the moon.

Then, just ahead, a match was struck, and by its light they saw Mr. Isinglass on his knees by the big rock. He was looking at a compass, and grunted to himself:

“Yes, fifteen due north would do.” He started off like a tight-rope walker, with one foot in front of the other, and counting aloud to himself:

“And nineteen west. Bless me, no; that won’t work—it isn’t west—and it’s paces, not feet.”

He stood a moment indecisively—a black silhouette against the night sky—next moment he was gone.

The watchers stared at one another in amazement, then started forward. The grass dulled the sound of their feet.

“What is it? Has he gone mad?”

Vernon shook his head and checked her with a gesture.

“I don’t know—but there’s something queer. Wait a second.”

Stooping, he moved to the spot where the old man had been standing, leaned over, and peered down the little rock-face. Mr. Isinglass was immediately below, mightily employed in trying to shift a large boulder. Vernon beckoned to Averil, and together they watched the singular operation. Then Mr. Isinglass began to address the boulder.

“Couldn’t you be a little more helpful and less heavy?” he pleaded. “It isn’t much to ask. I don’t want rain and wind to expose my secret to the first passer-by.” But the boulder would not budge an inch, and with a sigh the old man abandoned the effort and straightened his back. In so doing, his eyes and Vernon’s met.

“God bless me!” he said. “Who would have foreseen this?” There was not a trace of surprise or alarm in his expression. “As you’ve turned up so opportunely, be a good fellow and lend a hand.”

“But I don’t quite see——” Vernon began.

“No, but need you? I’d very much rather you didn’t.”

“You spoke of a secret.”

“Yes, but it wouldn’t be a secret if I told anyone.”

In the darkness it was impossible to see faces.

“You’re hiding something?”

“Yes——”

“But——”

Mr. Isinglass appealed to Averil. “Need I tell him my secret?”

“He told you his.”

“Now, that’s very true,” he said thoughtfully. “Give her a hand down, my boy. Capital. Now we’re all on the same level. But I doubt if I shall be able to justify myself in your eyes. You see, we’re all conspirators in one way or another, and the greatest conspirator of all is a power outside ourselves. It would have been a selfish indulgence, Winslowe, if the way out of this tangle had been by your confession. It would have been a selfish indulgence if the way out had been by my solution. Yet, in our separate ways, we’re both disappointed and a trifle humbled that the affair passed out of our hands.”

“What was your solution?” said Averil.

“Almost stupid in its simplicity, and it makes me feel very awkward to talk about it, for since men are far removed from gods, I am wondering if they have the right to try and rule chance.”

As he spoke his eyes dropped to the little cairn of stones he had erected, and suddenly Averil understood.

“You brought a treasure with you?”

“Oh, don’t,” he pleaded; “it does sound so asinine, such a disgusting piece of conceit. But I’d set my mind on a happy ending to the business.”

Vernon said nothing for a long while. Then:

“Pretty marvellous. So I suppose never for a moment did you believe——”

“Oh, but I did believe—I knew a treasure would be found. This was only—what shall I say?—a safety-valve, a toy for happy children to play with. After all, a very old man who is much too rich ought to be allowed to spend a trifle on toys if his fancy suggests it.”

“Toys,” Averil repeated. Then: “Aren’t you a lovely person!”

And the three of them stood there saying nothing and feeling warm and kind for each other. At last:

“Come, Winslowe,” said Mr. Isinglass, “your arm round this boulder and a big heave.”

“But I don’t understand—you are leaving this treasure to rot in the ground?”

Mr. Isinglass smiled and shook his head.

“Not to rot—to mature, for, you see, instead of making a gift, I am obliged to accept one. What’s buried here is only a trifle compared with the treasure of which, in common decency, I must take my share.”

“But no one would ever know——” Averil began.

“Maybe not—but you must let me have my way in this. Who knows but what we found to-day may be the last of the buried treasures? It is a pleasant thought to me that in taking it away we leave another behind. Perhaps if you read your *Times* at some future date you may find in the agony column an advertisement which starts: ‘Adventurers wanted.’ Then perhaps you will look across a breakfast-table at each other and smile, because you will guess there is still an old fraud poking his nose into other people’s happiness—an old fraud who isn’t ashamed to pattern himself upon a man who had the courage of his own inventions.”

A faint breeze stirred the grasses at their feet, a puff of silver dust greyed the eastern sky. The taste of dawn was in the air.

Averil shivered, and Vernon put an arm round her.

“You’re an odd man, Mr. Isinglass,” he said. “You nearly backed a loser in me.”

“ ‘Conscience makes cowards of us all,’ ” said the old man, “or heroes. Life is so full of wonderful things which drab people pass by unnoticed. If we try hard enough, blindfold chance more often than not throws out a helping hand.” He sniffed the new morning air with a kind of ecstasy.

“This beautiful old, young world of ours is like a coin, I sometimes think, with heads and hearts upon it—a coin we are given to toss.” He turned and looked where they stood with arms about each other, and added with a smile which lit up every wrinkle in his face:

“And I am sentimental enough to believe it is generally the hearts which fall uppermost.”

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00021609560



BU 7
25
100